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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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1855.



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CATHERINE IRVING.

CHAPTER I.

THE musical bells of Bow Church were ringing in, according to custom, the new year of 18—.

It was a night of heavy and incessant rain, and the sound came, as if muffled, through the humid air. Amongst the thousands of human beings who were at that moment intent upon the significant peal, each with his own individual impression or emotion, I have to do but with one.

In a room at the top of an old, spacious house, situated in the heart of the "City" of London, a girl of fifteen sat listening to the sound.

The apartment, ample in its dimensions, was poorly furnished. A small iron bedstead, a few massive but worn mahogany chairs, the workmanship of which was of the last century, a bureau of the same date, and a round, deal table, were almost all it contained. The uncarpeted floor gave it an appearance of still greater extent; and the effect of the whole scene, blank and dreary as it was, was rendered still more so by the sickly and inefficient light of the solitary candle. No attempt had been made to give it a more cheerful aspect. The white-washed walls were as bare as the floor; the windows uncurtained, and (in spite of the season and the weather) the sashes were thrown up; the blinds not drawn down, and one could see without into the black and gloomy night. The girl herself suited the scene. The light

of the candle, flickering with the draught, fell full upon her face. Though a pale face, it was far from a sickly one. Premature thought and vehement emotion had produced, as they invariably do, an habitual pallor. Few would have called it a pleasing countenance in spite of its power to fix the attention. Intellect and passion seemed to divide its expression between them ; both might have been read in the somewhat low but finely-developed brow, in the fierce brightness of the large blue eyes, in the nostril's nervous dilation, and in the delicate lips, firm in their clear outline, but in their flexibility, prompt to express every passing shade of emotion.

At this moment she was sitting with her elbow on a closed volume, her head bent on her hand, the fingers of which were crushing, with a convulsive grasp, the thick, dark curls which fell about her cheeks and throat. Her eyes were fixed upon the gloomy void which lay beyond her window, and in their concentrated



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it no longer ; I will have a change. Surely I shan't play the coward to-morrow !”

There seemed little chance, to judge from the present expression of the almost defiant face.

“ Let me try and fancy myself so happy as to get consent,” she continued, after a pause ; raising her eyes as we invariably do in the contemplation of a distant idea. “ I shall then work and strive as I long to work and strive, and with the glorious prospect of liberty beyond. Oh ! I will do my utmost. I won't soon give it up as lost.” Her lip quivered and her eyes filled with tears. She conquered the weakness almost indignantly. “ It will not do for one who has to fight her own battles—her own way to clear—to cry and grow faint-hearted. I must not pity myself too much. Perhaps, some day, I shall do more than fancy myself happy, for I suppose no human being goes to the grave without a taste of happiness

—a drop of pleasure, and my share is all to come. When it does come, I will exhaust my chance.”

She relapsed into silence. Her imagination was busy with one of those ideal pictures cherished by all the enthusiastic young.

“Ah!” she pursued, with gleaming eyes, “if I ever get so high, when everything conspires to pull me down; I will forget then how very rough was the up-hill road when I am sitting on the height. The worst is I am afraid my energies may give way; I feel weary sometimes of resisting and struggling. Perhaps in the end, especially if I fail to-morrow, I may give up the game, and consent to take life as I find it—though it is all dust and chaff. Yet God preserve me from the weakness.”

At that moment one o'clock struck.

“The year is an hour old,” thought she; “well, it has seen my resolution taken. This time to-morrow, how shall I feel? At least, I won't have to reproach myself for any weakness

of my own. I will do my very utmost to rouse up the weak old man."

With this resolution she shut the windows, drew down the blinds, and began to prepare for bed. Her very rapid preparations were soon complete, she extinguished the candle and laid herself down. No devotional exercises had delayed her. Fearing lest her excitement might keep her awake, she began to court sleep by repeating, in a monotonous tone, some smooth flowing verses. The desired end was gained. When the half-hour chimed, she did not hear it.

Before we enter on a history of the morrow, it will be necessary to take a condensed view of the past.

The earliest remembrances of Catherine Irving were of the old and gloomy house in which she now lived. She had no recollections of her parents. When she woke up to individual consciousness, she found herself under the guardianship of an uncle and aunt;

under the same guardianship she still remained. But, in fact, she was born in a continental city, even in Rome. Her father, Basil Irving, had been an artist by profession; but early in life as he had been cut off, he lived long enough to prove that the chances of his achieving either wealth or honour were against him. The element of success was wanting in his character; genius he had, but energy and patience, without which genius is a lamp without oil, he lacked. What he had the ability to conceive, he had not the ability to carry out to completion. It was not that he failed in manipulative skill, it was a more primary deficiency. The picture sketched upon the canvass, and he would sit down to contemplate it, filling up the imperfect outline in imagination, but wanting the self-sustaining purpose which would have enabled him to do so in fact. Had execution been comparatively as facile to him as conception, he would undoubtedly have been a great

painter; but as it was, he failed. It was the inevitable consequence of a temper which chafed at the slowless of the mechanical process, rebelled at the required laboriousness of his profession, and abortively aimed at producing the effect he wanted when he disregarded the only legitimate means.

To make success at once more difficult, and more imperative, he had married when only a student at Rome, and with means barely sufficient for his own support. He took for his wife a young Italian girl, the daughter of the house where he rented his studio, whose perfection of beauty and vivacious sweetness of temper had inspired an extravagant passion which set prudence at defiance.

He paid the natural penalty for his rashness in the wearing anxieties and bitter experience which followed. For three years he struggled against sickness and poverty. At the end of that period his young wife, whose beauty and vivacity had prematurely faded

under the blighting influences of her married life died, leaving a two-years' infant in his charge. This blow seemed to crush the young artist; he had no strength of endurance, and little capacity for resistance. The necessity of supporting his wife had roused him to something like exertion, that necessity withdrawn his fitful energies collapsed. Naturally consumptive, his recklessness of self confirmed the disease. In short, he seemed to give up life as a lost game. Added to the rest, he was infatuated enough to believe himself a disappointed man, because the world had refused to recognise in his imperfect performances the finished work as it existed in ideal completion in his own mind. He returned to England with his motherless infant, supplicated a home for her in his elder brother's house, and having obtained it, and thus relieved himself of his last responsibility, dragged on existence for a few weary months, and died at an age when other men prepare to begin to live.

Basil Irving had been the youngest and favorite son of a poor London clergyman. His father had acted with criminal injustice to his other children in order to furnish him with the means of gratifying the tastes, and meeting the wants, of the profession he had chosen. His eldest son, Richard, from the moment an old maiden aunt had stepped in to equalise matters by furnishing the means of sending him to college, frankly forgave, or rather forgot, this injustice. So long as he had books to study, and leisure to study them, he was little disposed to dispute with any man. He was then in a state of being where every want seemed met ; he was not only willing but anxious to let things take their course, so long as that course kept clear of interruption of his student habits. He had been intended for the Church, but the death of his aunt, and her leaving him a legacy large enough to purchase an annuity equal to his simple wants, induced him to change his intention. The life of a

book-worm he preferred to any other; as a clergyman, there would be a perpetual drain on his time and attention. He was not qualified, he said, for the duties of one, it was a crowded field, and there were many worthier aspirants. With these arguments, he decided the question, and retired with his library, not of general but of antiquarian interest, to the old house in the city of London, which formed an important part of his relative's bequest. In this bequest, his only sister, Sarah, was associated, as she had also been joint sharer of her aunt's favour during her life time, a favour simply based on the unjust partiality of the father. She inherited a legacy of the same amount as her brother's, and had employed it in the same way. She undertook the management of the house and their mutual income; and Richard was very willing to leave such management in her hands. The dust of his library was the breath of life to him.

In character, Sarah Irving differed from both her brothers. Hers was a deep and hard nature, in which past injuries rankled with an undecaying freshness. From childhood, she had resented the paternal injustice by a bitter hatred of her younger brother. Apart from that, she had a contemptuous intolerance for the weakness of his character ; had there been no incentive to dislike, there was a natural antagonism between them.

Even the death of old Mr. Irving, which occurred shortly before Basil's rash Italian marriage, did not in any degree mitigate the feeling. The possibility of further wrong was removed, but the uncanceled past remained. When, therefore, Basil Irving returned from Rome with no other hope for his child but in the benevolence of his brother, Sarah had exerted all her influence to frustrate that hope. Her brother's marriage had provoked an even deeper contempt than before, and to receive

his infant would have deprived her of revenging the boyish tyranny he had inflicted, the father's love he had absorbed.

But there was still a greater wrong to resent: at a crisis when a small dowry would, she believed, have secured her womanly happiness, that right had been denied, and her claim been forced to yield to the necessities of the artist's education.

But Richard's nature was kindlier, or at least his wrongs had not been so deep; Basil's pale looks and faded health touched the soft place in his heart.

"Why would not Sarah forget old scores, and adopt the child?"

In the end, Sarah agreed to adopt it; but not until she had compelled the father to go through an agonising series of doubts and anxieties. Now she would excite hope, that a few days later she might play with his fears. And when at length she passed her final word, it was owing to no relenting of her hard

tenacious nature, but simply because she thought her revenge, foiled by Basil's death, could better be gratified by having the life of the child under her control.

Under this sinister guardianship, Catherine's life opened, she grew up under an iron rule. Had she brought into the world with her, a soft docile spirit, she would inevitably have been reduced to the lowest degree of passive subservience, and servile timidity. But, on the contrary, her natural temper was at once resolute and passionate. She was born with an intense love of freedom and impatience of control that would have needed, even from the tenderest, a pruning hand. Perhaps she inherited her temperament from her mother and the land of her birth, but however that might be she was endowed with all the impassioned ardour we are accustomed to ascribe to the children of the south. With her, every feeling was an emotion, every emotion a passion. With such a character the only means of

government lay in getting a secure hold of her affections; where she loved she would obey. To endeavour to force submission, was to rouse the principle of resistance to fury. Yet this latter was the course Sarah Irving adopted. From her infancy she had tried no other means but coercion with Catherine; and, from infancy, Catherine had opposed her impotent defiance. She possessed, naturally, a wild exuberance of animal spirits, against which her aunt exercised the most repressive harshness. The shout and laugh of childhood were transgressions to be severely punished. But the positive will soon showed itself. On one occasion, when only in her fourth year, her tenacious hilarity, which defied the depressing influences around her, had brought down upon her a severity disproportioned to any offence which a child of that age could have committed. The consciousness of injustice and oppression, and the latent spirit of defiance, stirred, as an instinct within the infant soul.

"I'm not hurt, I *will* laugh!" shouted Catherine, with her face convulsed with premature indignation, and suiting the action to the word, she flung herself on the floor, raising her voice to its utmost pitch, in what, in truth, were rather screams than laughter, but still it was a noise which was the fault chastised.

From that hour, the woman and child stood opposed. The warfare was, of course, unequal, and the weaker was always the sufferer.

But though defeated and bruised with her hopeless resistance, Catherine was never overcome. Subdued one moment, she was on her feet the next, in an attitude as defiant as before. Instead of the repressive discipline to which she was subjected, crushing her instinctive passion for independence, it acquired a fiercer force from the prolonged necessity of resisting the power that would have borne it down. Added to this, her position infused a spirit of bitter self-reliance that bid fair to eradicate the womanly out of her character.

"I stand alone," had been her life-long reflection—"I fight my own battles—I get help from no one. Well, I can do without it. Thank God, He has made me strong both to struggle and to resist!"

But even as the proud thought passed through her mind, her lip would quiver, and the eyes, flashing defiance, fill with tears. How often, at such moments, if alone, she had buried her face in her arms, and wept bitterly!"

Sometimes a melancholy foreboding pressed upon her mind.

"All the little good there was in my nature, Aunt Sarah will stamp out. Nothing will be left but the power to hate her. I seem now as if I did not care for anything, and, God knows, there was a time when I could have loved even her."

Then more passionate thoughts would arise. Miss Irving, under plea that they could not afford it, but really with no other motive than

the severe mortification of her niece, refused to send Catherine to school. She professed to teach her herself, but beyond the most ordinary instruction, without which it would have been a public shame to have left her, her teaching did not go. Now, although Catherine had no opportunity of comparison with girls of her own age, for she lived in the dingy city-house as in a prison, from which she never escaped but with her aunt, she was able to compare her wretched acquirements with her capabilities and aspirations. She was a girl of strong mental power touching upon genius, and hungered and thirsted after knowledge as after an unsatisfied necessity. That the means of gratifying this strong desire were withheld was one of Catherine's keenest sorrows and deepest wrongs.

"She mars my future," was her reflection ;
"she will force me to live for ever alone ; for
how does she think I will ever live in a world
that will look down upon me ?"

Yet Catherine had an earnest longing to know something of the world from which she was shut out; and more than that, a latent passion to distinguish herself in it. Isolated and frowned upon—with her fervid affections cast back upon herself, and consuming their own vitality—she sometimes cheated a dreary hour by fancying the case reversed, and would clasp a friendly hand, and look up into the face of one who loved her. The same instinct led her—shackled by ignorance as she was—to imagine herself as accomplished as she was gifted; as having conquered the tongues and sciences she had the unexerted power to conquer. She would make herself the object of adulation to ideal beings whose homage was worth receiving, and which would stimulate her to higher efforts, until she had reached the utmost limit of womanly attainment: or she would turn her cultivated and disciplined powers into another channel. Why she could write now, how then would she write? As-

surely the whole world would give her a hearing! And in her imaginative ecstasy Catherine already heard the rapturous rustle of the laurel wreath, and clasped with trembling hands, drinking a deep draught, the cup in which sparkled the elixir of immortality. And then what bitterness to wake up and realise how barren of love, of knowledge, of all hope or chance of distinction, how tied and enslaved by circumstance she was!

At times the reflection wrought her up to fury, and as she paced her bed room floor, clenching her hands together, she meditated insane projects, planned the most impracticable schemes.

"Anything for freedom," she would say, "I would rather earn every morsel I eat by the sweat of my brow than receive it from my slave-holder." And, in truth, if the severest watchfulness had not been exercised, it is probable that in some abandonment of feeling the young girl would really have made her escape,

and tried a hand-to-hand struggle with the sternest realities of life. Her present existence was miserable enough to justify such a step. Miss Irving did not hate and persecute her now for her father's sake, but for her own. She was ingenious in modes of suffering; if there was one employment or household duty more naturally distasteful than another to Catherine's high spirit, it was that which was most surely required from her. She had no companions, and was absolutely cut off from society. True, Miss Irving had a few friends, and when she visited them took Catherine with her, simply because she would have preferred to stay at home; but these out-goings were more intolerable to her than her habitual confinement.

The little circle was naturally in Miss Irving's interest, and receiving her estimate of Catherine treated the young girl as though she were out of the pale of human sympathy, while she, with her bitterest indignation and contempt

excited, seemed by her conduct to confirm her aunt's representations.

When after a visit of this kind she returned home, and went to her bed-room, if her outraged feelings still supported her, she would sit down to read, as in defiance of the powerlessness of her enemies to dry up this source of pleasure. She had a few books that had been acquired by stealth, and were guarded with a proportioned vigilance. Amongst them were an old copy of Shakspeare, and another of the "Fairy Queen." Racy, exhaustless food these were, well fitted to nourish a growing intellect, to develop to the highest point a kindling, quickening fancy. Besides, having but few other books, Catherine studied these well, not to say profoundly. Hers was no surface knowledge; there was scarcely a fine passage in either author with which she was not familiar. No critic had helped her to discriminate their beauties, but her keen perception was unerring. Sometimes, as a diversion, she

would recite aloud her favorite fragments (her bed-room being at the top of the house, there was little fear of her being overheard), and she poured forth all the passionate energy of her pent-up soul. She had an instinctive consciousness that her self-directed recitation was good, for it moved her own feelings ; but she did not know how near her talent approached perfection. Under the guidance of her natural genius, scarcely could a theatrical connoisseur have suggested an improvement. But at other times she was too much depressed to read, and would stand by her window looking up moodily towards the straitened sky, and down into the narrow street. How fruitlessly on these occasions she beat her wings against her cage ; what passionate yearnings came over her to see a broad heaven above her head, a green earth beneath her feet, to breathe a purer and freer air ! Shut out from all sympathetic companionship, Catherine had but one outlet for her thoughts—already she wrote. She had

studied English under two of its masters, and was at no loss for words; she suffered, resented, and desired, and was at no loss for thoughts. Her effusions, sometimes in verse, sometimes in prose, under all sorts of forms—now a burning statement of her wrongs and emotions, now a fictitious story where she was what she desired to be—in spite of their crudeness and imperfections had the two important elements of power and originality. Their author knew it: genius, far as it is removed from presumption, can not ignore its own existence. The point to which Catherine most often looked was, when free of her present shackles, the getting first of a little elementary instruction, and the working out of a literary reputation.

“It is the only way in which I shall be able to make myself known,” she reflected; “and as I shall be cut off from love, I will have admiration.”

Richard Irving, buried amongst his books,

and walking through life with half-shut eyes, knew little or nothing of the warfare waged between Sarah Irving and his niece. His sister told him the girl had a most ungovernable temper, and he having a great deal of respect for her judgment, and a morbid horror of interfering in women's quarrels, left Catherine entirely to her management. He saw that the orphan was well clothed and well fed, and he persuaded himself it was not his business to interfere any further.

Such is a rapid outline of Catherine's life for the first fifteen years, up to the night when she was introduced to the reader. On that night she had come to a fixed resolution. She had been out to tea with her aunt, and had been introduced, by the lady of the house, to a young girl, much about her own age, who was spending the Christmas holidays with her relative. The young lady was talkative and sociable, and soon made Catherine acquainted with all the little details of her history. She

was an orphan, and had been adopted by her aunt, so far their circumstances agreed, but then came a grave distinction. Her aunt was not rich and would have nothing to leave her, so she was being educated for a governess. She spoke of the first-rate school to which she went, the excellent masters, the countless accomplishments taught, and, as a matter of course, acquired. She talked glibly of French, German, and Italian, music, dancing and sciences; and interrupted her recital every now and then, to ask her silent but attentive companion what she learnt, and how far in these multiform studies she was advanced.

Catherine evaded these enquiries, it was no part of her character to pour out her complaints to any ear; but the conversation wrought its effect. For almost the first time, the destitution in which the death of her relatives would leave her, occurred to her mind. Education, which she had often besought for its own sake, she would demand now as a means

of support. From the moment she was capable of being a governess, there would be the turn of her bondage and misery. She would be free to labour, and looking abroad into the world might choose her own field. The mere conception of the idea excited her almost to delirium. The hardships and difficulties of such a position she passed by, it only appeared to her a state of release and liberty. That she would stand in the world friendless and unaided was nothing, she was accustomed to rely on self, and at least she would be *free*—free from the yoke which had cruelly chafed the neck, struggling for emancipation—free from the down pressure and restraint of her existence! And more than that, would she not escape from monotony and confinement and begin to see what *life* was? Vitality swelled with a full tide within her soul, and long ago she had begun to writhe under the consciousness of her straitened and untaxed existence. What she asked for, was a hand-to-hand con-

tact with her fellow beings—was to question the living voice, search the living heart. Young as she was, she was weary of dreaming and speculating about things she had never seen; she wanted to know where she had guessed, to experience where she had imagined.

That night it came upon her, she could bear the present state of things no longer. She resolved to strain every nerve to induce her uncle to send her to school. She did not overrate her chances of success, but she determined to leave none untried. She knew well how difficult it would be to rouse her uncle from his state of indolence to active interposition; and how easy it would be for his sister to influence him in the opposite direction, and counteract her own most stringent arguments and passionate representations. And then if she failed? But Catherine left the step, in that case, to be taken, to be decided upon when necessity forced her to the decision.

For the morrow she had but one end in view—she desired to go to school—a school capable of educating her for a governess, and she must constrain Richard Irving to give his consent. It was on this resolution she had slept.

CHAPTER II.

CATHERINE awoke early the following morning, and without a fraction's diminution of the energy of purpose on which she had slept. There was no change in the depressing state of the weather, which was a matter of considerable concern, for one necessity was imperative—she must see her uncle alone. She had heard Miss Irving speak the preceding day of some business which must be transacted at once, and her hope and expectation were, that she would go out that morning to transact it. The rain indeed might be considered a sufficient obstacle, but, on the other hand, her aunt often went out in defiance of the weather. At eight o'clock the trio met round the breakfast table. Miss Irving never permitted the

depth of winter to make even a quarter of an hour's difference in her domestic arrangements.

"She had yet to learn," she said, "why people should be more incapable in the one season than the other."

On this occasion it was barely light enough to see; the fire, too, had been but recently kindled, and was quite powerless to give a cheerful air to the large, gloomy, and scantily furnished apartment. The narrow, drab-colored curtains had been pushed back from the windows, to give freer ingress to the feeble light; the rain still fell in torrents, and the noises of the street traffic, aggravated by the weather, and increasing every moment, rose upon the ear. Chill and dreary as were these external objects, the little party gathered round the breakfast-table, seemed by no means calculated to dispel their effect.

Sarah Irving, a woman of about fifty years of age, with manners and aspect popularly

considered lady-like, wore an expression of countenance sufficient to banish the idea of social ease or enjoyment. The features, naturally thin, were, at this period, rigid, as if the mind had moulded them into harmony with its own hard acuteness and relentless severity.

All that was yielding and womanly in her character, of which there had never been much, had been buried long ago beneath disappointment, hate, and retaliation.

"She might have been happy, and she was defrauded of her chance," was a conviction that had burnt deep into her soul; and from that hour she became intolerant of the happiness of other people. Cynical and splenetic she would always have been; but the adoption of her brother's child by furnishing her with an opportunity of revenge, deepened and matured by constant exercise, that stern vindictiveness which might otherwise have softened.

Catherine's presence was always enough to rouse her worst nature, for, apart from other considerations, it reminded her of authority resisted and defied, of close struggles for conquest beneath her dignity, and of more than one instance where the issue had been doubtful, or even decided against her.

She now performed the duties of the table in a severe silence. Richard, himself, was always taciturn, indeed he generally brought a book with him to meals, he had one now by his plate, but it was too dark to attempt to read.

In person, he was a tall, thin, and ill-proportioned man, whose dress always hung loosely about him. Little accustomed to society, he was always awkward and embarrassed when he found himself in it; and even in his own home invariably seemed flurried when addressed. He was a year or two younger than Sarah; with the same thin cast of features, but with a gentler, or rather an abstracted, expression. His

light brown hair fell, in thin, uncrisp locks, about his white, prominent temples, and was already much sprinkled with gray ; while one never met the glance of his dreamy grey eyes, but through the medium of spectacles. He now sat taking his breakfast as if unconscious of his occupation.

Catherine, the passionate and ardent girl, sat in forced silence, without one feeling in common with her companions. We have already described her, and at this moment, labouring to control her inward excitement, the flush which the effort caused aided the wild charm her face possessed.

The meal over, Richard went at once to his study ; and Miss Irving to her kitchen, after having assigned Catherine a weary task of needlework. As yet not a word had been said about her intention of going out, and the girl's heart began to sink. Her hands, trembling with cold and excitement, were scarcely equal to her employment ; and more than once she

had thrown it down, and turned to the door, with the intention of seeking her uncle then and running all chance of detection and interruption. But a moment's consideration always arrested her steps.

We need not describe the course of the whole day. At dinner, Catherine's hopes rose, Miss Irving spoke of her business engagement, and said she should be obliged to go out in spite of the weather.

"However she would give it all the chance she could; they would have an early tea, it might have cleared up by that time."

Consequently they took that meal an hour earlier than usual; the rain had abated a little, and Sarah prepared for her walk. About half-past five o'clock Catherine had the exquisite satisfaction of hearing the street door close on her aunt.

Miss Irving had not left her niece without an occupation, but Catherine disregarded it altogether. She paced up and down the

gloomy parlour, endeavouring once more to arrange her thoughts, and calm her almost stifling emotion. It seemed a crisis in her history, which, now it had come, she had not the courage to meet.

“Coward! fool!” she exclaimed passionately, straining her hands on her heart. “The time is running on, and I shall lose my chance!”

She became convinced that reflection tended rather to excite than soothe her, and with a violent effort at self-control, she determined not to waste another minute, but to go at once.

With this resolution she had turned to the door, when she was startled by the sound of voices on the stairs. A man’s voice was inquiring for her uncle, and Phœbe, their single servant, was directing him to Richard’s study.

Catherine knew the voice; she felt there was but one course to pursue, and without

consulting anything but her own impulse and interest, she flew to the head of the stairs.

"Mr. Fawcett," she exclaimed, with breathless eagerness, leaning over the banisters, and speaking to him as he stood on the stairs below her, "before you see my uncle I want to speak to you. Will you come into the parlour?"

The gentleman thus addressed quietly obeyed, while Catherine, in an agony of impatience at his deliberate progress, stood with the parlour door open in her hand, and beat the floor with her foot.

"Oh! how slow you are!" she said, with a long-drawn breath, when he was at length within the opening and she was able to close the door.

"You seem to forget that I am lame," was the answer, as he looked about for a corner in which to deposit his crutch, and found one in

the neighbourhood of the mantel-piece, over which he leaned.

"Oh, no, I had not forgotten," returned Catherine, quickly; "but every moment is precious just now, and I think you might have been a little quicker. Is it anything of importance you want to say to my uncle?"

"Why?"

"Simply because if not, perhaps you will put it off till another night. I have no time to explain, but my aunt is gone out, and it is absolutely necessary I should see my uncle while she is away."

Mr. Fawcett fixed an inquiring look on the vehement speaker, and then said—

"But, perhaps, if you could find time to tell me, I might be able to help you."

Catherine reflected.

"No!" was the result. "I will try by myself first. If I fail, then if you will, you shall see what you can do. May I go now?"

"Wait a moment, Catherine," urged her companion, anxiously. "I should like to know what you are so impatient to do. Trust me with your secret."

"Oh! it is no secret," returned the girl, vehemently, and throwing off in her eagerness, the hand he had laid on her arm to restrain her—"and I have no time to lose. I only want to make a statement, and win or constrain a promise."

"And on what are you relying for success?"

"On myself! When did I rely on anything else?" returned Catherine, haughtily, and with a dilation of her girlish figure. "Don't stop me, Mr. Fawcett! I have been preparing to speak all night and day, and I will not go to bed with it unsaid."

Mr. Fawcett made no further attempt to detain her, but there was an air of concern in his manner as he turned away. It was not lost on Catherine's quick perceptions.

"You begin to think, Mr. Fawcett," she said, bitterly, "that my aunt is right in what she says about me. But I must have my way to-night. I don't know when I may get such another chance of seeing my uncle alone, and I should go mad almost if I had long to wait."

"Poor child !"

Catherine's lip curled.

"Spare your patronising pity," she said. "Though you are a grown up man, I question if you know one half of what I know of trial and suffering. Don't think yourself superior, Mr. Fawcett, because you are happier."

"God forbid !" returned he, earnestly, and without suffering the girl's indignation to disturb his composure ; "but it is never well, Catherine, to attempt to measure the joys and sorrows of our neighbour ; we are sure to miscalculate. Yet with all your experience, you have not learnt to *wait*, even on your own confession."

"Oh ! I could wait for an object if I were

labouring for it; but I can't wait before I begin to labour."

"True, that is a hard lesson; I only know one harder—to be called upon, when all ready for action, to turn your labour into another channel, and give up your object altogether."

Catherine looked up quickly at the speaker. There was an intonation of deep feeling in the words not likely to be lost upon her, and an expression in the fine countenance, not so much of an emotion as of an emotion suppressed.

"Mr. Fawcett," she said, in a lower and softer voice, "if you have enough interest in me to come and hear what I have to say to my uncle, you may. I mean—will you?"

He comprehended her motive at once. If she had slighted or done him any injustice she would give her confidence in compensation.

He followed her, therefore, to her uncle's study.

Catherine knocked for admission, but opened

the door almost before her appeal was answered. Richard was writing amidst a heap of books and paper. He was at work, though he kept it a sacred secret from every one but his friend Mr. Fawcett, on a "Critical Dictionary of English Synonyms." He was lavishing more erudition upon it than was at all likely to be duly appreciated or to render it (if he had so vulgar a consideration) a remunerative labour to himself. At the sight of Catherine and the sound of her companion's crutch, he turned round on his chair in painful bewilderment. Fawcett coming forward, held out his hand, and accosted him.

"Thank you, Arnold, I think I may venture to say I am getting on," laying his hand instinctively on his papers; "but I confess, I don't understand clearly. What does Catherine want? And you too—I thought you generally came alone?"

Fawcett attempted to explain; but with

very partial success. Then Catherine tried herself.

"I want to talk to you a little, uncle," she said, "and Mr. Fawcett, not having any particular business, does not mind waiting."

"Well, it seems strange, but make haste, child, and then you can go away and leave us alone."

The prospect was disheartening, but Catherine determined to persevere. To counterbalance her uncle's unfavourable mood, was the presence of Mr. Fawcett, who, she had an inward confidence, would support her cause.

She therefore came forward, and stood near Richard's desk.

"What I have to say, uncle," she began, "will not be so quickly said. Have a little patience with me! I don't trouble you often."

Richard made no answer. There was something in the girl's glittering eyes, and the deep glow on her cheek that made him feel uncomfortable. He stood in dread of her temper.

Catherine paused. She was feverishly deliberating what would be the best way to begin, the surest mode of touching her uncle's feelings. Her future life seemed hanging on that moment. She began, at length, abruptly, as passion is always abrupt.

"Uncle Richard, I am miserable! I want you to help me—you can if you will—will you?"

"Miserable!" reiterated Richard, fidgetting on his chair, and pushing his spectacles up on his forehead. "I don't understand you, Catherine; nonsense, child!"

"It is because you don't understand me, uncle, that I am miserable. Wait a moment. Will you tell me what you have ever done to make me happy?"

"I, child! I have had nothing to do with it! I have left such things to your aunt. It is not my business to amuse a girl."

"The girl does not ask to be amused," re-

turned Catherine, bitterly ; “ and my aunt has betrayed her trust. She hated my father—she hates me. It has been the business of her life to make me wretched ! I have not come to reproach you, though you ought, no doubt, to have seen how I was treated. If you do not know, I will tell you. I have been cruelly, wickedly used ever since my aunt had me under her control. If I had been a delicate child I should have been dead by this time, if I had been soft in spirit, I should have been crushed and broken-hearted ! But I am not ; God made me strong in mind and body ! ”

“ Catherine,” said Irving, interrupting her, “ I will not hear you speak disrespectfully of your aunt. You have a very ungovernable and evil temper. I begin to fear you are not a good girl.”

“ A good girl ! ” repeated she, derisively ; “ no, I don’t think I am. However deep goodness might have been planted in my heart,

Aunt Sarah would have torn it up by the roots. Oh ! what a life I have led !”

Richard, nervously excited, rose from his chair, and began to pace the room. Catherine was quickening a latent conviction in his own mind that he had always struggled against. He began to receive the idea that perhaps he had not done his duty by Basil's child.

“What do you mean ?” he said ; “you are so violent, you don't know what you say.”

“Mean ! oh ! I can't enter into sickening details,” replied Catherine, with a swelling heart. “I mean, Aunt Sarah has persecuted me from my infancy. Don't imagine it was only the absence of kindness, there has been an active, never tiring cruelty. I have borne it for nearly sixteen years, and I can bear it no longer. What I want to do is to work for my living. That is my object ! I have a laid-out plan : it all depends on you, uncle, whether I shall carry it out. Do not refuse to help me !”

Richard paused in his walk, and stood waiting for her to proceed in a state of passive endurance.

"Aunt Sarah has often told me that you will have no fortune to leave me," pursued Catherine, more calmly ; " what resource have you provided for me when I am left alone ? None ! Had you educated me, you would have made me independent of poverty, but you have not. But that is not all—I who hate ignorance have been forced to be ignorant. My mind that was capable and craving, has been cramped and starved.

"What do I know ? Nothing ! nothing ! I can read and write, and am able to do that only because it would have been a crying shame if I couldn't. Has this been right ?"

Richard sighed, he was not so much convinced as overwhelmed ; the impetuosity of the speaker fairly bore him down and bewildered him.

Catherine resumed with increasing earnestness—

“Now I come to the point; it is not too late to repair this last evil. If you will, I will forgive the rest. Send me for two years to school, I will work hard, morning, noon, and night, till I am fit for a governess. At that work I shall never tire; with an object in view, I know how to strive and endeavour.”

At this point she raised her eyes to read her success in her uncle's face; it was an uncertain tablet.

Catherine felt she had not won the day yet, and her heart sank as the consequences of final defeat pressed upon her. She laid her hand with trembling eagerness, upon Richard's arm, and said, in a voice of passionate entreaty—

“Uncle, don't refuse me! So far as I can see, it is my only chance of happiness.”

Richard was evidently softened; he patted and stroked the little hand as if he were soothing a fractious child.

"Well," he said, "we must see about it. Of course, I can't give you an answer on the spot, I must think the subject over and discuss it with your aunt."

"If you do," cried Catherine, with renewed vehemence, "I shall never go ! Why, to ask my aunt to forward my happiness would be to ask her to destroy her own. It would be madness to expect her to set me free, my slavery is her relaxation. I don't deceive myself, and I would not deceive you. If I ever go to school, it will be in defiance of Aunt Sarah's efforts ; and they must be defied," she pursued, as the prospect of the future goaded her almost to frenzy—"they must be defied ! Knowledge and freedom are life to me—I will not consent to give them up. Why should I renounce my birth-right ? What power ought any woman to have to make me miserable ? But I will not be miserable—I will not only live in spite of her, but be happy in revenge."

Her eyes flashed, as she spoke, with an

imaginary triumph. It was, however, a very brief one ; for, as she looked at her uncle, she saw she had lost the advantage already gained. Oh ! she suddenly felt she had played her part badly. To irritate and wound the subservient brother, was not to gain the uncle's ear. Why could she not have argued calmly, and forborne all recrimination and invective, instead of yielding to this passion of complaint and accusation ? There was truth on her side, why had there not been self-restraint too ? The glance she gave Mr. Fawcett deepened this impression. In the air of painful consideration with which he sat gazing into the fire, in the compressed lips and contracted brows, there was no encouragement to be read.

Richard turned his eyes in the same direction. Divided between anger, compunction, and a sort of confused sympathy, he knew not what to say or what to do. He was not a man of action.

Fawcett meeting the appeal, responded to it at once.

"I think there is much truth in what Catherine urges," he said, "but of course the matter needs consideration. It has taken you quite by surprise, let you and I discuss it together." Then addressing Catherine, he added—"You had better leave us now, you may safely trust the matter in my hands—I will do all I can."

Catherine obeyed silently, she went back to the empty parlour, and threw herself, sobbing convulsively, on the sofa. It was the moment for re-action.

"Does he think," she asked herself, recalling Mr. Fawcett's expression of disapprobation, "does he think that I have learnt the impossible lesson—*to love my enemies and bless them that persecute me?* Would I have been cruel enough to look displeased when any one was in an agony. Have I really done wrong to-night?"

She started up from her recumbent attitude,

and dried her tears, but they soon flowed again.

“Oh ! I wish,” she thought, “that I were a noble character ! I could fancy my circumstances fit to test and mature such an one—patient to endure the inevitable, firm only to resist the evil. There are some, perhaps, who would have been able to do it ; to have borne my aunt’s persecution with an heroic meekness that might have conquered her in the end ; at least they would have had self-respect to lean upon and support them. But I have fought with her own weapons, and to-night, I am sure Mr. Fawcett thinks I have brought myself down to her own level. She could not sit still, she was excited and miserable, and wept passionately, in spite of her efforts at self-control.

“I won’t try to throw the faults of my character on my evil training,” she pursued, “that is to acknowledge I am weak ; the strong and good rise above their circumstances.”

She had approached the half-open door and could hear the sound of distant voices in her uncle's study. It turned away her mind from the channel of self-condemnation ; all her agony of suspense and desire returned. It was not fated to last so long as she expected, after the lapse of about half an hour, she heard the door open, and the sound of Mr. Fawcett's approach. Catherine resolved to meet her fate boldly, and flew forward to meet him.

"Well?" she asked, eagerly, seizing his hand, and searching his face, so far as the imperfect light would permit. In spite of her resolution, she could pronounce no more. The hand she had rested on his, trembled convulsively—Mr. Fawcett felt it—he pressed it with a warm emotion of pity and sympathy.

"I will not trifle with you, Catherine," he said, "so far as I can judge, without having seen your aunt, I think there is a great probability of your going. I confidently hope, too,

to be able to put the case in such a light that she will not oppose it."

Catherine's soul had been hanging on his reply, his unhesitating manner seemed more conclusive than his words. The overpowering effect of the hope thus excited, proved to her how deep had been her expectation of failure. For the moment she seemed stunned and breathless. If it had not been for Mr. Fawcett's supporting arm she would almost have fallen.

"Let us go in," he said, kindly, "and sit down and talk it over. You have been too much excited to-day."

The room was almost dark, except where the glow of the fire, which burnt with unusual ardour, threw its reflection on floor and wall. Catherine took the seat within its cheering influence, to which her companion led her. A burst of tears relieved her overwrought feelings.

"You must think me very weak," she said,

at length, "and after all my daring protestations."

He smiled gravely.

"To confess the truth, Catherine, I like the way in which you have received my news much better than the way in which you urged your suit. I have no desire to see a girl of your age a stoic."

"Oh, I am no stoic, I wish I were! Then you know I should be insensible to this emotion of gratitude which is almost too much for me. I feel that I must throw myself at your feet, and embrace your knees. I feel humbled to the dust, I have not deserved it. Now it is come, I feel I have not deserved it, and you, though you have pleaded my cause, despise me in your heart. I read it in your face as you listened. That idea seems to choke my gratitude, you ought not to despise me, Mr. Fawcett."

"Nor do I, Catherine. It was a very dif-

ferent feeling from contempt. It was fear and anxiety. It is a serious thing to be entering on life with passions so strong as your own. Passion is never in abeyance ; if we do not control it, it controls us. You said you would not be a slave all your life, you *would* be free. I sincerely hope you will."

"While you doubt it altogether?"

"As for that, it rests with yourself. But I imagine you think self control among the pusillanimous virtues, self abandonment almost meritorious."

"You are mistaken, then! I think self-control, especially when acquired over a strong nature, a sublime thing; all the more so because it glitters so high above my head. But for more than fifteen years my aunt has been trying to trample me under foot; to-night I had a chance of venting all the feelings that have been excited during that time—was it likely that I should speak in measured terms,

and moan softly like a dove? No amount of self-control will ever prevent me from asserting that as she hates me, so I hate her."

"Do you not exaggerate the state of your aunt's feelings?"

"No, Mr. Fawcett, no," said Catherine, impressively, "I have not the patience to tell, in words, how she has vented her enmity. You have an idea that I have not been happy, but it's impossible for you to comprehend how miserable I have been. If it had been nothing more, think how I have been imprisoned! I have never been into the country, and it's not mere words to say I have been almost mad with longing at times. To hear of the rush of the free wind in the tree tops, or the dash of the waves on the sea shore, gives me a sensation I could not describe, it is a passion of desire that puts me out of myself. There's a certain green tree that I can catch a glimpse of from my bed-room window, and a poor, broken-hearted little lark that hangs out in a

cage at the opposite house, and is mad with imprisonment, and sings in despair, that I have looked at and listened to, with feelings, such, I think, as few have known. Under the influence of such feelings, I have often forgotten my pride, and begged, and prayed aunt Sarah to let me go, even for a day, into the country."

"Well, Catherine?" asked Mr. Fawcett, tenderly, as she paused to command her voice. Catherine, soothed and encouraged by his sympathy, went on—

"You shall hear," she said, "my aunt always refused, I won't say *how*; but there was some ground for pleading that it would have been inconvenient to grant my request. I really tried to persuade myself to soften my frenzy of feeling that there was. Well, about a year ago a most favourable opportunity occurred. An old servant, who had always been kind to me, was going to see her mother, who lived at Iiford, and wrote to ask me to go

with her. She knew my circumstances, and even offered to pay my expenses. I was mad at the idea. I knew they would be kind to me, and I was to stay as long as my aunt would let me. My aunt would not let me go at all. I entreated her as I will never entreat her again, no, not even if it were to save my life!"

"Had she any ground of displeasure against you?"

"None! I knew beforehand, the invitation was coming, and I had been straining every nerve to keep my spirit under for days and weeks, that she might have no plea against me. Besides it must have been something very wrong indeed, to have deserved such a disappointment."

There was a pause between them. At length Fawcett said—

"I don't doubt, Catherine, you have been deeply wronged, I don't doubt your experience of misery. But begin to hope now.

I, as far as my capacity goes, will be your friend, and it is my creed that one true friend counterbalances a score of enemies. I believe, too, you will go to school. In new scenes, with new objects and pleasures, and with the chance of carrying out your plans, begin a new life ! Let it be your great endeavour not to let the past harden or embitter your heart. Don't bind it as a burden about you, to shackle all your future progress."

"Trust me, Mr. Fawcett, the past shall not prevent my future progress ! If I go to school I will turn it to account ; I have plans that stretch far forward. I will learn all they can teach me—to learn will be to enjoy ! You don't quite know me yet, you, my first friend, you shall not have cause to reproach me."

"My dear Catherine," returned Fawcett, smiling, "you don't understand me ! I did not, for a moment, fear you would waste your time at school, I can very easily believe you have exalted plans, and, moreover, are equal

to carrying them out. My fear is lest you should overlook the one grand interest, and while pursuing knowledge, and even getting distinction, should throw away happiness. I fear that you are setting out in life with fundamentally wrong notions on that point."

"Oh! I know what you would say," returned Catherine, as if shrinking from the subject, "the world's pleasures are all vanity! Who are they that preach this doctrine? Those that have exhausted the world. I must prove the vanity of certain things before I yield to the verdict. I should like to wear the crown before I trample it under feet. I cannot reconcile religion with my desires and intentions."

"I pity the choice you make," was the energetic answer, "and it is not too much to say that I tremble for the consequences. Take my word for it, Catherine, there is nothing in this world capable of meeting the claims of your strong heart, and you mean to carry it

unsatisfied and craving in your bosom for years, when there is peace and satisfaction for it at the outset. There is a hand stretched out to save and guide you, but you prefer to totter and stumble alone. You talk of crowns, and put back the only one worth a mortal's striving. You are intent on self aggrandizement, and forget that every step taken with that single object, leads you farther from what is really great."

Catherine smiled and shook her head.

"What a sublime theory yours is? But I am honest, and can't give in my allegiance to it. It stirs me to hear you talk, in that tone of deep self conviction too! But I am sixteen, and you double that age, and I am not equal to self-sacrifice. Depend upon it, Mr. Fawcett, the sparkle I see in life is not all deceptive."

"No doubt life has its pleasures, Catherine," returned he, gravely, "pleasures that glow and burn, and then turn to ashes. Do you think there would be much satisfaction, however

high you stood, if, looking beyond, you saw nothing but a misty or a frowning future ; a world gained, and a God unpropitiated. There is nothing in your strength of intellect, or your force of heart that will atone for the radical deficiency, on the contrary, it will only make it the more deeply felt."

Catherine was silent.

"I see I make no impression," he pursued, "but don't forget what I have said to-night ! I may never have such another opportunity, and remember, Catherine, I have entered my protest against your present views. You will find them delusive. There is but one right road to happiness, God grant you may never cast a hopeless look towards it !"

"It is such a narrow and hedged-up road, I am not prepared to walk in it yet," was her answer. "I don't feel the necessity as you do. I shall never own the inefficiency of this world's pleasures until I have tried them all,

and proved it. Ah! if I were but sure of getting what I would fain have!"

Catherine paused, for she heard approaching footsteps; it proved to be Phœbe, who brought in lighted candles; she had waited long past the usual hour, expecting them to be rung for, and now at last she took the matter into her own hands.

"Bless me, Miss Catherine, you here in the dark, and Mr. Fawcett too! You can ring the bell fast enough some times, it's a pity you didn't know when you wanted a light."

The tone of this exclamatory speech, uttered before Mr. Fawcett, deeply offended Catherine; she silenced the girl with a contemptuous answer, that showed a new phase of character to her observer.

When Phœbe had left them alone again, he said—

"No one must presume to call you to account; I see, at least, they will not do it with

impunity. I suppose there is no control to which you would submit?"

Catherine blushed.

"Phœbe presumes on my aunt's treatment of me, that is why I answered as I did. But you are unjust, Mr. Fawcett, I have suffered you to call me to very serious account to-night, and I will always be amenable to your control."

"Will you? That remains to be proved! I dare say you will always give me a hearing, and then act according to your own impressions."

"I must always act according to my own impressions," interrupted she, smiling, "but if you can control my impressions—?"

"A serious *if*, yet to-night shall not discourage me. I dare say I shall often make the attempt, and truly, there are some influences which are irresistible. Is that eight o'clock striking?"

"Yes, but you are going to stay to speak to my aunt?"

"Not to-night. I have some business to do which I cannot put off. Good-bye, Catherine."

Catherine did not take the offered hand at once, and Mr. Fawcett withdrew it.

"When you know my extreme anxiety," she said, "I think you ought to make some little sacrifice to relieve it."

"Or, rather," he said, severely, "you think every thing should yield to your will. Take care, Catherine, how you make self supreme! More than once to-night, I have seen how intolerant you are of any obstacle that stands in your way. Such a character defies friendship."

"You are unkind, Mr. Fawcett," she said, with a quivering lip. "I judge by myself, I would sacrifice every thing to help a friend."

"And I would sacrifice every thing but

duty ; and when I say I *cannot*, I mean I *ought not*."

Catherine smiled.

"If I were called upon to help any one I loved, I am afraid *ought not* would not be 'cannot,' to me. But to-morrow I trust there is no 'ought not.'"

He reflected.

"Yes, I will come to-morrow evening, if possible."

"Oh ! I shall fully depend upon your coming. Shall I speak at all to my aunt, or will my uncle ?"

"No," said Fawcett, "it is to be left entirely to me ; that is, if you can trust it in my hands."

"Entirely ! One word," cried Catherine, eagerly, "before you go—you don't think me ungrateful ?"

"I don't lay any claim on your gratitude till the prize is secured. Good bye !"

"I shall go down and open the street-door

for you, and then, perhaps, you will give me your hand again?"

"I shall go too slowly for you, I am afraid," he said, looking at her with an arch smile.

Catherine coloured painfully, and tears filled her eyes.

"How can I prove my penitence?" said she, pressing closer to his side. "I wish from the bottom of my heart, I could give you my strength, and limp through life myself. At least, let me be your crutch now."

And she offered her arm.

He shook his head.

"The means are not proportioned to the end, and you are the last person that could endure to limp through life. The cross that one can bear, would break the back of another. But I won't refuse your escort."

It was a wide spiral staircase, composed of several flights, and terminating in a circular hall, lighted by a feeble candle lamp, which hung from a long chain, fixed on the floor of

one of the upper landing-places. Catherine, who had hitherto kept pace with her companion, sprang down with a bound the last half-dozen stairs, and opened the street door.

"It does not rain, Mr. Fawcett, and the half-drowned moon is struggling to show herself. How quiet the street is!"

"Good night, Catherine!" said Mr. Fawcett, firmly, holding out his hand. "You seemed inclined to recommence the conversation, and I have no more time to spare."

"A conversation! it is the first time I have ever had a conversation, and no wonder the novelty tempts me. Good night! don't forget that you have to say 'good night' to me to-morrow."

Catherine watched him out of sight, then closed the door, and proceeded up-stairs. Before, however, she left the hall, she could not resist the temptation of giving the pendant lamp a swing; and when she reached the head

of the stairs, on her way to her own bed-room, she stood for some time leaning over the banisters to watch its oscillations. The movement seemed to aid the complex thoughts, the hopes and fears, and half-formed resolutions that were working in her active and excited brain.

CHAPTER III.

ARNOLD FAWCETT was the youngest and most efficient partner in a highly respectable and but moderately wealthy mercantile firm, whose offices adjoined Richard Irving's gloomy city-house.

The intimacy that existed between two men so different in age and character owed its origin, ten years back, to some little street courtesy which the absent and dreamy antiquarian had received from the young merchant.

Richard, in a flutter of trepidation and gratitude, had asked Mr. Fawcett to his house, and before the first evening's intercourse was over each had discovered the bond of scholarship and college-breeding in the other; and it was

mainly on this foundation their friendship was reared.

Fawcett's original destination had not been the counting-house; he had been brought up at Cambridge with a view to his studying law, and the prospect of a fortune that would make him independent of all but voluntary labour in his profession. The death of his father dissolved this delusion; the reputed rich merchant left his affairs in a state bordering on bankruptcy, and the young man found himself called upon, at the age of twenty, to earn his own subsistence, and gain his own ground in the arena of life, instead of entering it with an inheritance possessed. He who has risen above the influences of prosperity and boundless parental indulgence, and who, at such an age, is striving at his books with a high moral purpose in view, is not likely to be overwhelmed by the first shock of pecuniary misfortune.

Fawcett at once threw up his college course,

applied himself to the investigation of his father's affairs, arranged, consulted, adjudged till every difficulty had been met, every claimant satisfied, and he himself, free of every obligation, was as poor as such rectitude could make him. However, he was not without friends; he had always had a strong bias to the law, and now an accomplished master of the profession came forward with the most generous overtures.

At the same time, for he was considered to have developed considerable business talents in his late transactions, a business connection of his father's obtained for him a situation in a merchant's office, with a salary of £300 per annum, and a fair chance of progression.

Had the two offers been a matter of pure choice, Fawcett would not have hesitated a moment, for the law had been and was a passion with him, and trade foreign to his taste and views; but precisely at this crisis an ap-

peal was made to heart and duty which neither could resist.

His mother had died when he was very young, but not before she had deeply impressed him with sentiments of love and reverence for her memory, and it was from the only sister of the early-dead but ever-venerated parent that the demand came to sacrifice inclination to principle.

Mrs. Hamilton had married for love, and very imprudently, a country curate with eighty pounds a-year, and on his death, after many years of actual but disguised starvation, was left in a state of positive destitution with her youngest and only surviving child. Arnold Fawcett was the only relative she had, and what could she do, moneyless, in weak health, and burdened by a two-years'-old infant but turn to him for help?

A brief but sharp struggle was produced in the mind of her nephew, and then he decided

the point:—if he accepted the mercantile appointment he could at once offer her a home, whereas his law studies would put all assistance out of his power. He declined the lawyer's liberal offer, surrendering, at the same time, many a fondly—nursed ideal scheme of self-distinction and professional reform, entered the merchant's office, and at once provided, with himself, a home for Mrs. Hamilton and her daughter. There was no difficulty in this arrangement; the widow knew nothing about the sacrifice which had been necessary; her nephew's representations were kind and delicate enough to have overcome a pride more sensitive than her own, and she might also be excused for considering that her services, at the head of his household, though by no means an equivalent, were of a value not to be overlooked. True, there was the child, but Fawcett did nothing by halves, he soon overcame her feeble scruples by assuring her that the little one, as his play-thing and future

companion would almost turn the balance of obligation in her favour. Mrs. Hamilton was fain to believe him, and from that hour she and Frances had known no other home.

Fortune had been favourable to their benefactor, if to hold the onerous position he held may be esteemed a favour ; long since they had removed from his chambers, in the city, to a pleasant, retired suburban abode. Their social relations had been equally prosperous ; all was affection and gratitude on the one side, and delicacy and generosity on the other : indeed the idea of obligation had been mutually lost by this time. Fawcett had a happy and rare art of producing such a result. Frances looked upon him more as brother and friend than in any other light, and Mrs. Hamilton's motherly love seemed to equalise their position. Nor was Fawcett himself a disappointed man, in a noble self-sacrifice there is a reward almost great enough for compensation, and to one who mainly looked upon

this life as a preparation for a higher, there was rich indemnification for the decision he had formed. Sometimes, indeed, when he watched other men rise to an eminence he might have reached, or zealously urging forward some worthy reform in which he himself would joyfully have spent his strength, a momentary impatience seized him at the limitation of his lot, and a momentary desire to throw off the yoke he had himself put on. But these moods were rare, and now almost of the past; to his mind there was a consolation at hand, true, he might have distinguished himself and served his race more effectually, and the world knew it not, but the conviction was strong in his soul that there was one who, while searching every infirmity, passes over no capacity, misjudges no condition of His creatures.

Of all this, Catherine, of course, knew nothing, indeed she could scarcely be said to know Mr. Fawcett at all. When he came to

the house, he invariably spent his time in Richard's study, and it very seldom happened that the pale, eager-eyed child crossed his path. At a somewhat later period, her disposition and treatment, by Sarah Irving, even though but casually observed, arrested his penetration and excited his interest.

When younger, Catherine had regarded him with much of the mistrust with which all her aunt's visitors inspired her ; still, coincident with this feeling, a certain respect and admiration existed. The smiling patience with which he bore an infirmity which would have been a cross too heavy for her endurance, commended itself to her mind ; then, also, her uncle spoke of him as a man of classical education, which was a point of esteem to the ignorant girl ; and, finally, there was an undoubted charm in his appearance, and a polished refinement in his manners, which she felt all the more because they were graces to which she was little accustomed. His kindly interpositions on her

behalf, as they were for the most part fruitless, never reached her knowledge ; but as she grew older, and her perceptions quickened, she learnt that he entertained for her a feeling of friendly interest. She discovered, too, little as she saw of him, many of the individual points of his character. There was an earnestness, an absence of all lightness, in his deportment that accorded with her tastes ; and even in the limited conversation she sometimes chanced to overhear there was a pervading tone of sentiment that led her to the belief that the standard by which he judged things was not only higher than ordinary, but higher even than her own ideal theories. She received the impression that he would explain the duties of life very differently from her own notions thereon, and sometimes the desire had arisen to discuss not only this point, but many others with him, and tell him about herself, and ask his advice, or to question him closely about his own personal history. All she knew about

him was that he was a partner in a certain mercantile house, and she marvelled at such a choice of a profession, and that he lived at Sydenham, with an aunt and cousin. She doubted not that that fortunate cousin, living with her mother, and in familiar intercourse with Mr. Fawcett, was blessed with a most unfair share of happiness. However on the whole, accustomed to see him from her earliest years a received and respected visitor, she did not speculate so much about him as she would probably have done had their acquaintance been more recent. Moreover, Catherine had been, for the most part, self-occupied. It would be superfluous to dwell on the impatience with which Catherine bore the lapse of the next twenty-four hours. She tried to obtain some expression of intelligence or sympathy from her uncle ; but Richard looked as though the incident of the preceding evening had left no trace behind.

Mr. Fawcett came, however, true to his ap-

pointment; and on his saying to Miss Irving that he had come expressly to discuss a point of business with her, Catherine was sent from the room. She flew up stairs to her own apartment, where she would have space and liberty to vent her excitement; but she could find no sufficient vent for it, it seemed to increase with the lapse of time, and she changed the scene.

She was frozen with cold, and sick with the ardour of her suspense, and she went down into the kitchen for warmth. She paused at the parlour-door as she passed it, within which they were deciding her fate; but Mr. Fawcett was speaking, and his low tones defied her effort. She longed to burst into the room, and demand the issue of the argument; but prudence prevailed, and she pursued her way down stairs. There was not a fire in the kitchen, and Phœbe was sitting at work by the corner of the dresser mending a hopeless

stocking (her personal property) by the light of an unsnuffed and guttering candle.

Catherine leaned gloomily over the mantelshelf, crushing the cinders into ashes with her foot.

Phoebe had looked up at her entrance, and asked, in a familiar tone—

“Well, Miss Catherine, hasn’t your aunt given you no needlework?”

Catherine chafed at the question. It recognised an authority which seemed all the more intolerable to her, since she had seriously meditated her escape from it. Before, however, she could answer, her aunt’s bell rung. Phoebe was in no hurry to obey her summons. “She would just finish her hole,” but Catherine urged her departure with vehemence.

“I dare say it is for me, you must not wait a second! Here!” Snatching the stocking from her hand. “Give me your work!”

Phoebe grumbled, but submitted, in truth

her curiosity was aroused. She was soon back again.

"You're wanted, Miss Catherine, and where's my stocking?"

Catherine passed the insignificant question over, indeed she scarcely knew where, in her excitement, she had thrown it. She had sprung to the door on hearing Phœbe's message, but she turned back again. Apprehension, always keen as the desire is strong, was busy at her heart.

"How does my aunt look?" she asked.

"I don't see no difference from common," was the answer.

"And Mr. Fawcett, of course he is there?"

"Yes, he is; may be you'd like to know how he looks?"

Catherine made an expressive movement of deprecation. Phœbe laughed.

"I'm not good enough for the subject, I s'pose?" she said. "But if you'll take my advice, Miss Catherine, instead of fuming down

here, (I see, plain as daylight, there's something in the wind), you'll do better to walk up stairs at once. Your aunt's temper ain't one that improves by waiting."

Catherine followed her advice. She made no attempt to control her emotion, it was beyond her control. The parlour-door reached, she opened it at once, and entered.

Her aunt was sitting at the table with her hands folded upon it, and her eyes fixed on the door, as if watching for her appearance. There was a disturbed expression in her face, in spite of the attempt she made to compose her features.

Mr. Fawcett had stirred sensibilities which had long lain dormant; there had been a time when she was different from, and better than what she had since become.

He himself was standing by the fire-place, with his back to the door.

Catherine went directly up to him. She had cast a glance at her aunt, but knew not

what inference to draw. She thought Mr. Fawcett's countenance would be more explicit. There was an agony of anxiety in her eyes as she raised them to his face, but she was again at fault.

"Tell me," she cried, impetuously, "what is the result? How insensible you are! Am I to go?"

Mr. Fawcett took her hand soothingly, but Catherine snatched it from him.

"If I am not to go," she said, bitterly, "I don't want to be comforted. I can bear it; yes or no?"

"Yes, then," said Miss Irving, abruptly, rising as she spoke, and approaching the two, "yes, on one condition, and surely there is no condition that will deter you."

"I think not," said Catherine, raising a defiant glance to her aunt's face; "I think not, in spite of your ingenuity."

"It is a simple condition," returned Sarah, quietly. "I have never made a secret of my

feelings towards you. I have vowed within myself that I would never raise a hand to further your happiness, and I never will. If we were able to meet the expenses of such a school as you demand, not a shilling should be expended in that way. Basil could scarcely ask that I should clear his daughter's path in life. The hate which has survived his death, and which you quicken every day of your life, may be culpable, but it exists, and I follow its dictates."

Sarah paused. She was excited and wished to conceal it. Catherine, half-maddened by the suspense in which she was still kept, urged her on.

"I understand that—Mr. Fawcett understands that—but the condition?"

Sarah resumed, in her own way—

"With these feelings, and the power to hinder it, is it not something that I have been brought to consent that another should help you? The case stands thus: Mr. Fawcett is both

able and willing to send you to school—you may go if you like. Dependence upon him may be better to your taste than dependence upon me—his charity more tolerable than mine.”

For a moment or two the aunt and niece looked at each other. It is true Sarah's better feelings had been skilfully worked upon that evening; but still it is doubtful whether she would ever have given Catherine the chance if her latent conviction had not been that it would be rejected indignantly. Catherine guessed as much, but, for the time, she passed that by.

There was the alternative presented, and she must decide. Charity! the word stung her pride to the quick, but on the other hand were ignorance and incapacity. Should she put back a helping hand at the outset of her path, and thus deny herself the chance of ever running the race well? Or should she take it as, in like circumstances, she would offer it? She had no conventional scruples, grounded on the

fact that he was man and she woman, and he comparatively young and unmarried. She weighed the obligation simply as conferred by one human being on another. But it was a heavy obligation! To begin life with it, was to go through with it, for it could never be repaid.

Mr. Fawcett watched her expressive face with the most intense solicitude. One of the conditions on which Sarah had yielded her consent to his proposal was, that not only should it be plainly stated by herself to Catherine, but that he should not utter a word to guide her decision; and he had no choice, antagonistic as was the necessity to every manly and generous feeling. Sarah watched her with no less interest. The fact of her hesitation roused her former animosity; would the girl, after all, win the day against her?

"I have decided," said Catherine, at length,
"I accept the condition—I will go!"

Mr. Fawcett uttered an exclamation of relief

and delight; he was now free to speak, but Catherine interrupted him.

"Not now," she said; "I know what you would say, and I don't attempt to thank you, because I believe you must know what I feel. I *do* feel it, but I would have done the same; and you won't think me ungrateful because there has been a struggle in my mind. It's easier to give than to receive."

"I think I do you justice," he said, "you have acted just as I would have a friend of mine, and you know we are friends! And, besides, Catherine—" for he thought it wise to divert the intensity of her feelings, "when you have got the crown you talk of, the selfish satisfaction that I shall cherish in thinking I gave some little help at starting, will make you creditor then."

Catherine smiled, but her eyes flashed as she replied—

"I will get it if it is only to have an oppor-

tunity of telling the world to whom I owe it."

Here Sarah interposed. She had sufficient self-control, however bitterly she felt, not to give her niece the triumph of witnessing her mortification. Her word passed, she could not withdraw it, nor was it necessary to lower herself still more in Mr. Fawcett's eyes, whose character compelled her respect. The current indeed seemed running in her niece's favour, and she must let it take its course; but the tide might turn after a time, and she would watch her chance. Her desire now was, since she was to go, to be rid as soon as possible of the successful Catherine.

Mr. Fawcett, as Catherine's advocate, was equally eager for dispatch, and in their hands the matter was left. Before he took his leave that night every detail was settled. His cousin, before mentioned, Frances Hamilton, returned to school in the following week, and

it was an easy arrangement for Catherine to accompany her. It was also settled that the day beforehand he should take her to Sydenham, to introduce her to his aunt, and that she might make some preliminary acquaintance with her future school-fellow.

During the brief interval that elapsed, Catherine was more excited than happy. She passed restless and sleepless nights, revolving her plans for the future, and feverishly impatient to bring that future near. She anticipated the day to be spent at Mr. Fawcett's, and her introduction to his relatives, with almost as much solicitude as the opening of her school-life.

Would they like her or she them? Would they know on what terms she was going to school, and how, if they did, would they look upon it?"

And then the question recurred, a thousand times suggested, had she done right in ac-

cepting the terms herself? Would it not have been true and not false pride to have rejected them?

But no, any thing before her present bondage! Any state was less humiliating than to remain her aunt's unwilling pensioner! Besides, it was false pride, surreptitious dignity; she would have forced the same favour on another, and despised their rejection of it.

When the important day arrived, Catherine was up before it was light. Mr. Fawcett was coming early to fetch her, so that he might intrench, as little as possible, on his business day. She was in a depressed mood. It was gloomy weather, and separation from life-long associations, of whatever character, has something painful to the imaginative heart. She took a farewell of the house, visiting every nook and corner, from the garret to the vaulted cellars. She stood by her bed-room window, looking out on the dingy, familiar scene, as if to impress it on her mind.

"I have been so miserable," she thought, "the chances must be in my favour now."

Another reflection occurred to her. She would not enter on her new life with an active hate raging at her heart. No, to a certain degree, she would forgive Sarah. Possibly the wrong had not been on one side only, she would try what a partial concession would do. It was very difficult to a nature like hers, and when made, the concession had, in spite of her, something of the character of an aggression. She felt bitterly that she had failed, but her aunt's reply subdued the feeling.

"It is a poor attempt at healing grievances," she said, "but whatever it had been, it would have ended the same. There can never be a suspension of hostilities between us."

Catherine did not renew the attempt. She went at once to her uncle's study to bid him good-bye. It was a very short interview, and Richard played his part nervously. He bade her—

“Be a good girl, and stick to her books; and your temper, Catherine—you must try and subdue your temper!”

Richard Irving was one of those men who never associate the idea of *character* with women. Any distinction in their manifestations of themselves, he invariably ascribed to *temper*—anything more fundamental, he viewed as contrary to their inherent and indisputable weakness.

After these leave-takings, and one more friendly with Phœbe, Catherine sat down by the window to wait for Mr. Fawcett. She was in a bitter, sullen mood; in spite of her pride, her heart ached. Under what auspices she left her home! Home!—it was a prostitution of the phrase. There was a keen bitterness in the reflection that no one loved her; there was a heavy weight in the consideration that she had inspired an absolute animosity. She contrasted her position with that of others—with that which she ascribed to Frances Hamilton—

and arraigned the harsh Providence which had made her to differ. Then she thought of Mr. Fawcett's exhortations, and asked herself recklessly why she had not urged in her behalf the slight inducement she had, to turn to one who had dealt out her comforts so sparingly, and denied her so much.

"Let the happy be godly," was her reflection; "it is unreasonable to expect it of the miserable."

At length Mr. Fawcett came. He found her still sitting alone in the parlour.

"Are you ready, Catherine?" he asked. "You must excuse my hurrying you; my time is not altogether my own."

"I have been ready some time. Don't you see I am dressed? and my box is in the hall."

"But your uncle and Miss Irving? Have you bidden them good bye?"

"Yes, yes! I am quite ready. I don't

want to see them again, nor they me. Do let us be gone !”

Mr. Fawcett guessed the state of her mind, and handed her to the cab without a comment. He returned to speak to Miss Irving, who had now come into the hall to watch their departure, and then placed himself beside her.

“We shall just catch the train,” he said, looking at his watch, “and then, Catherine, we shall be at home in less than half an hour.”

His kind tone almost overcame her, yet for worlds she would not, if any effort could prevent it, have shed a tear. No, it should never be said she had wept at leaving her house of bondage !

When they took their places in the railway carriage, Catherine remarked bitterly—

“This is the first time I have ever travelled by steam ; I have been well taken care of.”

"And Sydenham, under its gloomy winter aspect, will be your first view of the country," returned her companion, passing over what her manner implied. "Well, never mind! The future may make up for the past."

Catherine relapsed into silence. The carriage was full of people, with one of whom Mr. Fawcett began to converse. He was a man whose externals were devoid of all interest to her, for there was not a point on which the imagination could have rested; and the subject under discussion, running upon a late bankruptcy, was quite out of her sphere of sympathy.

She looked out of the window, therefore, watching the city recede into a farther distance, and receiving a sense of pleasure from the widening sky and the perceptible purity of the air.

If the flat and sterile landscape did not please, it interested her, and the nearer they got to their destination, the more did bitter

reminiscences of the past yield to speculations about the future.

Mr. Fawcett's house was not far from the Station. It was a low, spacious, one-storied cottage, standing in the midst of a large garden, the whole enclosed by a wall high enough to baffle the curiosity of the passer-by. At the present season, its aspect was not very cheering. The few fine trees, (in the undeniable antiquity of which Mr. Fawcett took a secret pride,) which in summer, heavy in foliage, gave to the sequestered garden so unsuburban an air and shed so green and profound a shade, now looked gaunt and drear in proportion to their glories past. The lawn was still green, together with a few sturdy evergreens; but scarcely the hue of a solitary flower was to be distinguished, nor, so far as the eye could reach, was there a single leaf left to tremble upon the stripped and shivering trees.

The ground, too, was soft and marshy with

the late rains, yielding even to the lightest foot-steps, and the leaden sky hung overhead without the faintest break to promise a clearing up.

Catherine received to the full the impression of dreariness; she saw things as they were, and had no summer recollections to fall back upon. As she looked about her, it almost seemed as if life was extinct or torpid, such a heavy stillness brooded around.

"Oh! this was not what she would have! this was not her idea of the country!"

Mr. Fawcett watched with interest the restless dissatisfied air with which she took in the scene, and was almost prepared for the enquiry:

"Why do you live here? it is not beautiful; and if I were free to choose, I would make the best of my privilege."

"It is making the best of my privilege; it is very convenient, which is a chief consideration, and in summer I call it beautiful.

Obliged to be in town by a certain hour in the morning, I can't go very far in search of the picturesque."

Catherine coloured, she felt the answer a reproach to her good sense. Their proximity to the house prevented any extension of the conversation, and called her thoughts back to their former channel. How would the Hamiltons receive her? how should she like them? Her anxiety amounted to emotion when, in answer to Mr. Fawcett's summons, she heard light, springing footsteps approaching the door. In another moment it was thrown wide open, and in the hall, glowing with the reflection from a blazing fire in a neighbouring room, the door of which was wide open, stood Frances Hamilton.

Before Catherine was prepared for it, she found both her hands seized by the young girl with a warmth that might have belonged to old acquaintanceship, and as she led, or rather, in her eagerness, dragged her to the

lighted apartment, she called out in a clear, ringing voice—

“Mamma, they are come! Make haste! Catherine is come!”

Then placing a chair before the full front of the fire, she invited Catherine to it, saying—

“Sit down and warm yourself—you must be frozen to death! And don’t scruple to put your feet on the fender, I always do.”

At this crisis she met the look of her cousin, who was watching the scene with amused interest, contrasting the careless ease and warmth of the one with the proud shyness of the other, who was evidently as much overwhelmed as gratified by the unexpected reception.

Frances, in her turn, surveyed Catherine with a quick, penetrating glance.

“I hope I have not been too headstrong for you,” she said; “but I hardly looked upon you as a stranger. Arnold says I am violent.”

This speech aroused Catherine to a sense of her position; had there been a touch of

wounded feeling in it, it would have cut her to the heart ; as, however, it was spoken in a light tone, and with a glance of confident affection towards Fawcett, and as she had recovered from her first surprise, she answered with her habitual self-possession.

“ I was not prepared for so much kindness, knowing I had no claim upon it. I was silent because I could not express myself.”

“ There you are mistaken,” returned Frances leaning caressingly over her chair ; “ all Arnold’s friends have a claim on us ; and as for you we are to be schoolfellows and must be friends.”

There was a fluent grace about her manner and talk that struck Catherine as the result of of confidence in the affection of those around her, and forced a painful contrast with herself upon her mind. Besides, almost in the first five minutes of their intercourse, she perceived the essential difference of their characters ; if she had felt all that Frances expressed, she

would not have been so prompt in putting it into words.

"Frances, go and seek your mother," said Mr. Fawcett, looking at his watch; "I have no time to lose; she cannot have heard you."

When Frances had left the room, he said to Catherine—

"Don't judge Frances hastily. I am quick in rendering the expression of your face. There is a depth under all that seeming lightness, or I am very much mistaken."

Catherine smiled.

"He likes deep natures then," she thought; she might have said it had not Mrs. Hamilton entered at the moment.

Mrs. Hamilton, a handsome, cheerful woman, in the prime of life, was one of those kindly, genial, motherly natures that place every one at their ease who are brought into contact with them.

Mr. Fawcett introduced Catherine to her by saying—

"At last, my dear aunt, I have brought Catherine to see you," and she received the young girl with a genuine kindness that went direct to her heart.

"Come, I must have a kiss! and take off your bonnet, my dear child, I want a better view of my foster-daughter."

It was too much for Catherine; tenderness was a strange thing to her, and releasing herself from Mrs. Hamilton's embrace, she turned to Mr. Fawcett with the intent to express the passionate gratitude that throbbed at her heart.

"For," thought she, "how kindly and forbearingly he must have spoken of me."

Words failed her however, it was left only to the eloquent face and expressive gesture to explain her meaning.

Mr. Fawcett saw her heart, and holding out his hand said—

"Good-bye for the present, Catherine, I

must be off to town. Will you come with me to the door?"

In the hall he interrupted her fervent expression of feeling—

"It is enough, Catherine, that you will be able to make yourself happy here. Frances has long craved for a companion. If you can reconcile yourself to the change, let this be your home for the future. If we can persuade your aunt to part with you, I don't know which of us will be most pleased at the acquisition."

Catherine was silent with astonishment—the idea dazzled her. At the same moment Frances, who had stolen softly out, clasped her arms round her waist, exclaiming—

"We settled that long ago—mamma and I without Arnold! Let him go to town! We shall discuss the matter by ourselves." They did so accordingly.

Mrs. Hamilton assured Catherine of her sincere interest in her, long ago excited by her

nephew's report, and that this project of adoption was of her own suggestion. Frances pleaded strenuously—

“And, after all,” she said, “what was it but for Catherine to consent to pass the holidays with them? School over, and she was going out into the world.”

Catherine coloured painfully.

“Did Mrs. Hamilton, did Frances know?” but Mrs. Hamilton interrupted her.

“They knew all about it, Arnold had told them everything as it occurred, and they not only approved but admired her decision.”

The point, however, was left, in a certain degree, in abeyance; Catherine could not hastily consent to an adoption into a family on which she had no claim; but it was arranged that at the close of the half-year she should at least spend the midsummer vacation with them, and that was a long period to anticipate.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER this important negotiation, Mrs. Hamilton, who had been summoned by their arrival from the kitchen, returned to the completion of her domestic affairs, and left the two girls alone.

Frances took Catherine up to the pleasant little bed-room which had been prepared for her. There was a fire burning, an unaccustomed luxury to her, as, indeed, was the friendliness of her young companion. While Catherine stood by the glass hastily arranging her toilet, Frances took a chair by the fire, where she could command a view of her movements. Catherine, on turning round, met her fixed gaze. Frances laughed.

"I will confess the truth," she said, "I was

wondering that Arnold never told us how pretty you were, and even when I questioned him about it the other night, I got no direct satisfactory answer."

Catherine involuntarily turned back to the glass, she had never much considered the subject. She surveyed, with a penetrating scrutiny, the reflection of the tall, supple, erect figure, the pale face, with its relief of loose dark curls, and its large, expressive blue eyes. She could not but see, for she had an artist's perception, that there was beauty in the pure oval of the countenance, in the clear, but delicate outline of the features, and in the form of the small classical head. The next impulse, and she obeyed it, was to look at her companion.

Frances Hamilton would have struck an ordinary observer as the most beautiful of the two.

There was more of the roundness and freshness of girlhood about her, there was, too, ani-

mation in every movement and vivacity in every expression. There was nothing so decisive about her aspect as in Catherine's: we mean she was neither tall nor short, but a graceful height between the two, nor was she emphatically dark or fair. The clear complexion was of a medium fairness, the abundant hair brown in colour, the large, well-opened eyes grey. There was a softness and harmony in her face which insensibly pleased, and a charm in the ever ready smile, that was seldom wanting about the lovely mouth, that won for her golden opinions on all sides. Her friends admired her for her liveliness and amiability, and they were right, for she possessed both; but above and apart from these she possessed some qualities they never suspected. She was herself conscious of faculties which deserved culture and development, but these things necessitate effort and energy, and Frances was mentally indolent. To amuse or charm her friends by her vivacity or accomplishments was

easy enough, and under the impulse of the hour she seldom failed to do it; but when alone, and in a reflective mood, she would severely condemn the vanity which had been the moving spring, and vaguely hope that the time would one day come when she would turn her talents to a more productive and worthier account.

Unlike Catherine, for she had had a nobler teacher, she acknowledged but one legitimate aim in life, utterly reprobating that self-seeking which wants nothing beyond its own appreciation and glory; she had high notions of the beauty of self-denial and the worth of humility.

All, however, that her intellectual convictions did for her was to show her her distance from a point she never strove heartily to attain, to infuse a deep and admiring respect for her moral superiors, and in her most serious moments, a profound self-dissatisfaction. With a popular reputation for vivacity, it had become

a sort of necessity with her to support it, so far that it was only in solitude she gave herself up to grave consideration ; often in society she had checked the expression of some solemn conviction, simply because it would have seemed out of character to come from her, or put off the very appearance of thoughtfulness or depression from a similar motive.

The only one who suspected the under-current of deeper feeling was her cousin, Arnold Fawcett. He had watched Frances from her infancy, and knew her character better than she knew it herself. He knew how to touch her sympathies, and enlist her half-dormant enthusiasm on some behalf, that raised her, for the time, to the level she ought always to have occupied. If, in the course of his reading or daily experiences, he met with the record of some act of high worth, some instance of virtue proved, or sentiment of more than common elevation, he knew he made no mistake when he summoned

the lively Frances to his side, and claimed her comprehension and sympathy. This recognition of her better self, all the more grateful because never formally expressed, was a claim on her affection and gratitude to which she made a full response.

The careful and kind friendship which Mr. Fawcett had bestowed upon his young cousin, he would very gladly have extended years back to Catherine Irving.

Even though only an occasional visitor, he could not but suspect there was rashness and injustice exercised towards her.

He had but a very imperfect knowledge of the circumstances, but he saw enough to fear that the course pursued would finally end either in an extinction or distortion of the finer qualities of her nature. Sarah, however, who had the right of government, frustrated and negatived all the plans which his benevolence led him to propose. Long ago he had wished to send Catherine to school, offering, willingly.

to divide the expense, for he knew their limited means were put forward as an obstacle, but she had rejected the proposal. Now, when at length he had succeeded, it was after a lapse of years had shed their injurious influences over the young girl, he could not but fear that the effect of the past would be a shadow and a stumbling block in her future path. He resolved, however, to do all he could; her welfare should, from that time forth, be his concern; nor would he, in his exertions on her behalf, suffer himself to be turned aside or disheartened by the self-will or any other evil of a character which had received no training but what was likely to stimulate it in the wrong direction.

He could rely pretty confidently on the influences of his own home. Mrs. Hamilton and Frances had known her from report, as long as he had known her in fact, and had naturally imbibed his interest and precise views on the subject. Therefore, when he stated his plans,

even if they had had the right of dissent, they would have had no desire to exercise it. They were almost as anxious about her welfare as he was himself. Frances indeed was eager to have a companion, "such as she was sure Catherine would prove;" and when her cousin judiciously endeavoured to moderate her expectations, and hinted that, as a companion, Catherine, would, perhaps, tax her forbearance, the answer was prompt—

"Oh! I am sick to death of common-place girls, I am sure we shall suit each other."

It never occurred to Mr. Fawcett that there was any peculiarity in the relation he was thus instituting between himself and Catherine. He had been so long accustomed to consider himself the guardian of his young relative, that to extend that office to another child of the same age seemed a very natural proceeding. I say a "child," advisedly, for though little more than five-and-thirty, he had ceased to look upon himself as young, and, in his eyes,

these girls of sixteen were emphatically children. Many things had conspired to give him a sense of premature age. In the first place, to speak plainly, he had been crossed in love. That passion had taken a very firm and profound hold upon his nature, at an age when the affections are rather vehement than deep; but, unfortunately for his peace of mind, he was capable, both of ardour and depth. The young girl had held a higher position in life than himself, but she favoured his suit, and, being an only daughter, her parents agreed to consent to their engagement, taking his wealth in compensation for other deficiencies. When, however, the death of his father was followed by so unexpected a disclosure of his affairs, and the young man was called from college to fight his own way in the world, their consent was unconditionally withdrawn.

There is no need of details here, the lady gave up her lover, won to filial obedience as much by her dread of poverty, it seemed to

him, as by her sense of duty ; and Arnold began his up-hill journey with that heavy weight which disappointment lays upon the heart, and with that smarting sense of injury which duped affections give.

He did not, as we have seen, turn misanthropist. Perhaps he partly consoled himself by thinking it was better to have discovered her weakness than to have been bound to it through life—the development would have come. Nor did he despise or depreciate the sex in consequence. It was well, perhaps, at this crisis, that Mrs. Hamilton brought him in contact with her own warm heart, and that the tiny Frances was at hand to climb upon his knees, and press, with her infantile caresses, the bitterness out of his heart. But he finally abandoned the idea of any future love or marriage. Circumstances seemed to favour the resolution. His home became a very happy one without a wife, and no one crossed his path to tempt him from his purpose. His

friends looked upon him as confirmed in bachelorhood, and so he did upon himself. Then too, he had been so long playing an independent part in the world, he had reached a substantial position at an earlier age than most men; his experience of life had been varied, he had seen the tottering infant grow up before his eyes, till she had reached his shoulder, he had long been the head of a family—he certainly had long ceased to feel young.

Catherine and Frances, sitting over their bed-room fire, during the whole morning, made considerable advances to intimacy. Catherine had much to ask about the school, so familiar to the one, and such a dread *terra incognita* to the other. It was a theme on which Frances was eloquent. As a preliminary, she allowed it was a *good school: i. e.*, they had excellent masters, and those who wished to learn had every facility.

But, nevertheless, there was very little vene-

ration in her report. The female teachers seemed exempted from the respect granted to the male ; and the scholars, except one or two, were ridiculed as a combination of dulness, inanity, and frivolity.

Catherine looked surprised.

“ Wait till you have been there a month,” said Frances, “ and then you will wonder at my moderation. I often think, if things at school strike me as they do, how would they appear to Arnold ? ”

This latter remark diverted the conversation.

To expatiate on her cousin's excellences was a more grateful theme to Frances than any other, and Catherine was an attentive and sympathetic listener. In short, the one had so much to tell, and the other was so eager to listen, that before Mr. Fawcett returned at six o'clock to dinner, they were on the most friendly terms.

That meal was a very social one, to Catherine it appeared under an extreme light from contrast.

The simple elegance with which the repast was served, the cheerful glow of the hot fire, and the soft but penetrating light of the lamp, in fact, all the externals of the scene were of a character of unaccustomed pleasantness. Then, too, the freedom of the familiar talk in which each took their part, the kindness and animation of Mrs. Hamilton, the vivacity of Frances, and the quieter enjoyment of Mr. Fawcett—how different from the oppressive silence against which her spirit had often risen and under which as often sunk.

It was all so new to her, that she sat for the most part silent. She had never taken a part in the kind of easy, lively chit-chat which was going forward, and she felt she should do it but awkwardly. Besides, the force of contrast disposed her to an indignant brooding-over of the past. She began to see now from what

kindly relations, from what sweet influences, she had been cut off. Frances's light laugh, so often repeated, raised a bitter emotion. Was she not as young? had she not the same rights? and yet how foreign to her feelings it would be to laugh like her! Passionate, deep and sullen was the current of her life; in her whole nature there seemed now no response to that spirit of light gaiety. She knew it had not always been thus. She could remember a time when her ears had not been quite strange to the sound of her own laugh, and when existence alone, if she had been allowed to enjoy it, was enough to make her happy. But the instinct of the child—for the remembrance dated far back—had been crushed; oppression may be boldly and even in many points successfully resisted, but its scythe is at the root of all youthful buoyancy of feeling. The common familiar terms of affection smote Catherine's ear with an acute agony.

“Mamma,” “my love,” reminded her that

she had lost what Frances so heedlessly enjoyed; and roused, as chance things had often done before, a passionate yearning after that young southern mother, dead in girlhood, in whose caressing arms she had passed the first two years of her life. She had often thought—but it must have been imagination rather than memory—that she had a recollection, dim and shadowy indeed, but still a recollection, of both her parents. Present to her fancy was a large, bare room, with a subdued light from upper windows, in which, as an infant, her father and mother, each kneeling on the floor to guard and encourage her, she had essayed to totter from one to the other. Were the beaming dark eyes and passionate kiss of the one when the haven of the maternal bosom was reached, and the sickly paleness and sad smile of the other, reality or not? She believed it to be reality, and clung to the recollection. To prove the reality, were there not moments in which the vague cadence of some

sweet foreign tongue seemed to strike her ear, as if it were an echo from some prior state of being? But however that might be, it was of the past; a gloomy, heavy period had followed it; would that she might dare to hope that too was past, and that a future, such as she would have, was dawning.

Mr. Fawcett divined much that was passing in Catherine's mind. When the dinner table was cleared, he invited them all to draw their chairs round the fire, himself taking one between the two girls. Music was generally the order of the night, for Frances both played and sang well, and he was critically fond of the science; but he thought it better left alone on this occasion.

It might painfully remind Catherine of her deficiency.

"Pray," he asked, looking at both with a smile, "are you fully prepared for your departure to-morrow morning?"

Frances demurred. She would not object to

another day or two at home, especially now Catherine was come; but when the question was directly referred to Catherine, she said—

“I am longing to be at it! I would not lose a day, no, not an hour!”

“I am already quite afraid of Catherine,” said Frances. “Resolution such as hers will not only soon lessen any little difference there may be between us, but in the end leave me far behind, gazing at her progress, but quite incapable of keeping up with it.”

Catherine smiled somewhat bitterly.

“Will two years of effort, Frances, make up for nearly sixteen of neglect, even if I were capable of a prolonged, never-relaxing energy?”

“Prolonged, never-relaxing energy,” repeated Frances, smiling; “I wonder what Mrs. Cooke’s young ladies would say to that idea, granting they could grasp it?”

“Will you tell me, Frances,” enquired

Catherine, anxiously, "what you learn, all of which I know nothing?"

"Learn! if you had asked me what I *knew*, I should have been embarrassed, but I can easily tell you what I learn. Music, and singing, and dancing, including certain calisthenic exercises, which are as admirable for the impetus they give to industry by compelling you to mend the garments they tear to shreds, as for the muscular development they compel. I learn French, German, Italian, and drawing; we are taught, too, a few of the sciences by means of very elementary works, and still more elementary knowledge on the part of our teachers; and as for the more vulgar details belonging to the 'grounding,' they are not worth mentioning, much less attending to."

"Can you speak French?"

"Yes, but not such as they talk at Paris."

"And German and Italian?"

"I can string a few phrases together, after an interval of profound reflection."

"Can you read Dante with as much pleasure as Spencer, and—I don't know much about German authors—but can you enjoy reading them?"

Frances laughed.

"It is never fair to take anything for granted. How do you know I feel any pleasure in reading Spencer? But to be candid—I can read Dante with Carey open before me, or my master at hand to make the crooked places straight, and I manage to make out some sort of meaning in the less abstruse Tasso; that is as far as my Italian erudition goes. As for the Germans—and, by-the-way, don't speak so slightingly of them—I take such pains to crack their rugged nut that I generally get at the kernel."

"Do you like the flavour so much?" asked Fawcett, smiling, and laying his hand on her shoulder.

"I do," said Frances, emphatically, and with a shade of deeper feeling in her face, while Catherine who had not followed this diversion, but was looking straight on into her own future, said—

"That would never do for me! I would not begin a language unless I was sure I should conquer it thoroughly—possess myself of it—make it mine! And I *will* do so; when I turn every energy and power I have on one point, it will be strange if I can't master it!"

"And when they are mastered," asked Frances, "is your reward to be the being able to teach them well to your pupils?"

"Not exactly. The knowledge will bring with it its own reward. Will it be nothing to have the books of all these countries open to you—to be able to get at the best of all they have?"

"Books!" repeated Frances; "I have almost

got tired of books already. That's a very partial reward, after all."

She had not before given utterance to any sentiment which had struck Catherine as akin to her own habit of thought, and in this reply it was more the manner than the words which conveyed the sympathy.

"Do you suppose," she answered warmly, "that I should sit down content with life, because I had mastered a paltry language or two? No, indeed; something more than books is wanted."

Mrs. Hamilton smiled; the earnestness of the speaker amused her, while Mr. Fawcett asked, as he looked with interest into the glowing face.

"What are your requirements for life, then?"

"What a question!" returned Catherine, with a quick and almost scornful laugh. "I can't answer it. I don't know myself yet. I

do know I want to be happy, but what will serve to make me so is a problem. I could tell what I would not have. I don't want to lead a quiet life—stagnation is the worst misery to me. I want to *feel* that I am alive in every pulse—I want *action* for every power that I have."

"You should have been a man," remarked Mrs. Hamilton, good-humouredly.

"Oh! I should," returned Catherine, with zeal. "I wish I had been! I would have cut out my own path then—no one should have turned me aside! I would assuredly have done something. Then I would have been a great artist!"

Mr. Fawcett smiled, but a graver feeling succeeded. On what would these strong energies spend themselves hereafter?

"But why not be a great artist now?" he asked.

"Because years have been wasted when I should have been at work, and a thousand things hold a woman back from being a great

artist. It is easier for her to be a great author, but that is difficult. Everything is easier to a man."

"I grant that, but I should like to hear your reasons for thinking so, Catherine."

"If I were a man, then, I should be going to the university instead of to school, and should be learning Greek instead of French, and Latin instead of Italian. I suppose I should learn logic and mathematics, and there is nothing taught under the sun, but I should like to know. If I were going to be a writer, here would be a start for me! Suppose I had real talent, what would not all this drilling and discipline have done? But being a woman, I have none of these advantages; and if I distinguish myself without them, what should I have done with them?"

"But that's not what I complain of," interrupted Frances, who had followed Catherine with her whole heart; "before we establish our position there's a prejudice to overcome.

The book must be second-rate, and the painting too, if a woman wrote or did it ; and the consequence is that a double amount of excellence is necessary, first to subdue the notion, and next to help it to take its proper place. Whereas a place is granted at once to any thing that their own sex has done."

With sentiments so coincident the two girls shook hands, even Catherine laughed.

"I can solemnly assert girls never talked in this way when I was young," said Mrs. Hamilton.

"Of course not," said Frances ; "we belong to the age of progression. But what says Arnold ?"

"That I find I don't quite know you yet, Frances. I had no idea you held such opinions about the unjust oppression under which your sex labours. We must discuss this point another time ; my notions, I am afraid, would offend you both."

"I will tell you, Catherine, what they are,"

cried Frances, gaily, "all bound up in an axiom. A woman steps out of her sphere when she steps into public life. Arnold admires more the good wife that mends her husband's stockings, sitting up to do it when he is gone to bed, than Madame. Roland on the scaffold. And, to confess the truth, of the two I should prefer to be the first rather than the last myself."

Catherine smiled. "So should not I!" the smile signified; and Fawcett read it aright.

"Catherine," he said, in a lower tone, "there's disappointment at the end of every path but one."

She did not dissent, but it was out of respect to the speaker; she believed earth had an elysium and nectar of its own.

The rest of the evening passed in a more minute discussion of future plans and arrangements for the morrow. Mrs. Hamilton was to take them to school, as Mr. Fawcett had not the time at his command.

Catherine's heart swelled at the kindness which associated her name with Frances', as if she had the equal right of sisterhood.

She was glad when the evening was over, and alone in her room she was free to weep at will. She was not given to tears, but gratitude is as powerful to subdue as injustice is to harden. Every feeling with her amounted to a passion ; she knelt down to give it an outlet.

"I must thank God," was her reflection, "I cannot receive His good gifts in silence!" and with a sudden impulse as she recalled Mr. Fawcett's words, she added passionately — "Thou hast made me what I am ; teach me what I need, and mercifully lead me to it."

CHAPTER V.

ABOUT three o'clock on the following day, Catherine and Frances, under the care of Mrs. Hamilton, reached the Wolverton station. Broughton Hall, their final destination, was about five miles distance, to be travelled by coach. The journey had been rather a silent one. Frances felt depressed at the near prospect of separation from her mother, and the six months' term which stretched before her; and Catherine, full of restless conjecture and desire, had both brain and heart too much excited for conversation in a railway carriage. The coach, too, was full, so that there was the same restraint; Frances, however, seated next to her mother, began to talk to her in whispers; while Catherine, separated from both, looked

out of the windows at the country through which they were passing. It stretched away to the horizon, on all sides one vast plain ; the only relief to the monotony being that here and there large tracts of meadow land were lying under water. This fact arose from the periodical overflow of the river which ran through that part of the country, and whose limits it was now impossible to distinguish. A leaden sky hung overhead, a few melancholy trees, chiefly elms and poplars, loomed gaunt and leafless through the heavy atmosphere ; while the different houses and country seats, which dotted, at rare intervals, the ground, rather, by their forlorn appearance, increased than redeemed the general dreariness of effect.

Keenly susceptible to external impressions, Catherine's heart sank as she looked around her. She closed her eyes that she might shut out the scene, her imagination was repelled by it, and it fell back upon itself. She was fond

of calling up, by the aid of that faculty, tropical scenes ; it was invariably beneath the shade of the odorous lemon or myrtle that she sat down ; it was the deep unstained blue of a southern sky to which, through their branches, she looked up ; and, if she went further and called a voice to her ear, almost instinctively the fancied words were spoken in a foreign tongue. From some such dream as this, to which the very antagonism of the present scene forced her, she was startled by the grating of the wheels on a paved street. The coach had entered a little market-town which possessed but few seeming points of interest. It had an interest, however, which belonged to itself alone ; but Catherine knew it not. She cast a careless glance at the old inn—the Swan—ignorant that there, some fifty years ago, in a tremor of excited expectation, one of the first of English poets had awaited the arrival by coach of his playful and affectionate cousin, Lady Hesketh. How often, too, in visiting

his friend, Mr. Bull, the tutor of the Independent College, the humble exterior of which failed to attract Catherine's eyes, must the same man have paced the one street of that little town !

I am not sure had she known its associations, whether Catherine would have felt any very deep interest in the place. Hers was neither the temperament nor the age for a due appreciation of the author of the "Task." In this town they dropped most of their fellow-travellers, and Frances had thus an opportunity of getting a seat beside Catherine, and pointing out "Broughton Hall," which could be distinguished in the distance.

It was a large brick building, of unique architectural formation, and, having no trees of any size about it, stood out in hard unpleasing relief against the sky. It was placed in the midst of rather extensive grounds, the whole enclosed by a high wall which defied the curiosity of the passer-by.

One word before our travellers enter, of the head of this establishment. Six years previous to the present time, Mrs. Cooke had been content with a dozen pupils in a small house in one of the least fashionable of the London suburbs. At that period, she and her two daughters, assisted by a dancing master, had discharged all the functions of the school. But during one of the vacations, with leisure at command, Mrs. Cooke meditated a bold flight. She had long been, and, I confess, with some justice, dissatisfied with her present sphere, wherein the work was heavier and the profits lighter than suited her theories of compensation. It happened that on the very day the lease of her house expired, a seductive paragraph in the *Times* caught her attention. It set forth the merits of a certain mansion in the county of B—shire, *yclept* "Broughton Hall," in terms we are not ambitious to emulate. What penetrated her mind was the impression that its eligibilities might be appropriated with eminent

advantage to the purposes of a school. The following morning she took train, and, without saying aught to her daughters, went to see it. She found the house absolutely a castle—it dated several centuries back, and owed its name to its founder, who, having an eccentric taste, had built his residence after the model of the Bastille. There was a *prestige* in these facts not to be overlooked. Added to that, its conveniences had scarcely been overrated, and had, undoubtedly, been very much increased by a new wing lately added by some temporary owner, who had held in laudable defiance the fact that it entirely marred the unity of the original plan. The surrounding country, too, though flat and uninteresting, was reputed to be healthy. There was but one drawback. Owing to long neglect, the grounds were in a state of rank wildness, not very far removed from the primary condition in which the veritable Sir John Broughton must have found the ground when he pitched upon it as a

site. However, such as they were, they chiefly lay to the back, which was in no place overlooked; consequently, very partial training would do to fit them for a play-ground, and the expense in relation to the front would be but moderate. In short, in defiance of the amplitude of the "hall," its high rent and her risk of success, Mrs. Cooke took it on the spot. It was a bold speculation, but it seemed to answer. The lady followed up the first step. She engaged masters for every branch of knowledge, and every possible accomplishment of the first order, who reflected their credit on her school. She spared no outlay in the way of genteel advertisement and well compiled prospectus; she almost lavished the whole of her little capital at the outset, and then prepared to stand her chance. Chance turned the current in her favour. Whether it was the name and aspect of the "Hall," the new brigade of professors employed, the resident French teacher, the "gymnasium," which, as a crowning *coup*

d' état, had been raised, the pretensions and skilful manœuvring of the principal, I cannot say ; but certain it is a name was established, and pupils flocked in on every side.

At the time of which I now write it was as it was reputed to be, a most flourishing establishment.

To return now to Mrs. Hamilton and her companions.

The gates had been opened by a severe-looking footman, who preceded them up the avenue, and at the front entrance consigned them to a female servant who, in her turn, conducted them to the drawing-room.

"I hope Mrs. Cooke won't keep us long waiting," said Mrs. Hamilton "I promised Arnold I should be home by tea-time."

Frances had enough to do to restrain a burst of tears.

"Don't speak of 'tea-time' and 'home,' in that way, Mama—it's cruel under the circumstances !

Catherine had not heard the remark ; she was intently gazing from the window upon the bleak, drear grounds, to which the waning light of the wintry afternoon gave an additional gloom ; she knew what kind of country it was which was lying beyond the high brick-wall that bound her present sphere of vision ; the atmosphere of the house and of the bald state-room just entered chilled her ; combined as it was with the vague but certain prospect of the trials and warfare her ignorance and long neglect would entail upon her beneath that roof : in spite of her struggle against the feeling, the impression was strengthening into conviction that this new phase of her life scarcely promised happier circumstances than the last.

At the sound of approaching footsteps she turned eagerly towards the door. Her first glance, she thought, would teach her what kind of treatment and consequent amount of comfort she was to expect from the lady who

was the head of the establishment. Mrs. Cooke opened the door almost noiselessly, and advanced into the apartment with measured steps and a footfall solicitously quiet and repressed. Tall and erect in figure, generally dressed in black silk, the rustling of which was the only sound she permitted when in movement, with fair aquiline features, her appearance was what is popularly called "pleasing and lady-like"; but there was a dire absence of womanly sensibilities to be traced, by careful observers, in the hard lines of the well-formed mouth or the surface brightness of the cold blue eyes. Her manners were unpleasingly stiff, she herself deemed them dignified but they were not so; in truth Mrs. Cooke wanted facility with strangers and had an awkward consciousness of it, which she strove in this way to conceal. The result was she made people uncomfortable; even the fluent Mrs. Hamilton never felt at ease with her.

"She was very glad to welcome Miss Hamilton back again," and shook hands with her in proof of the assertion. Nor was it unnecessary, for the measured intonation did not put the fact beyond a doubt.

When Catherine was presented to her she surveyed her with a degree of attention that considerably tried the young girl's patience. In order to spare Catherine the mortification of hearing her deficiencies discussed and provided for, Mr. Fawcett had written to Mrs. Cooke giving her all necessary information, and indicating the plans he wished pursued. He had tried to produce a prepossession in her favour and to engage the lady's sympathy and interest; he had succeeded in arousing her curiosity.

"It would be a great advantage," she said after a few moment's scrutiny, and retaining Catherine's hand patronisingly, "for Miss Irving to have such a friend and companion as

Miss Hamilton ; under the very peculiar circumstances, she might say the benefit would be inestimable."

"Not at all," said Frances quickly, as she saw the burning colour rise in Catherine's cheeks, "Catherine is able to teach me quite as much as I can teach her ; we shall help each other !" While, Mrs. Hamilton hastened to say, that Miss Irving's abilities would soon atone for any little neglect there might have been."

Mrs. Cooke bowed and smiled, and answered accordingly, but she had caught Catherine's glance and felt the abrupt withdrawl of her hand, and, to say the least, she was not prepossessed in her favour. At this crisis, as if to relieve Mrs. Hamilton's impatience of an interview that was always irksome, a gong sounded through the house and furnished her with a pretext for departure.

"If your servant will get me a fly from the

Inn, I will go at once," she said, "I know that is the tea-bell and I should be sorry to detain you."

Mrs. Cooke rang the bell and the order was delivered. A little desultory conversation ensued, in which of course neither Catherine nor Frances joined. They sat with somewhat sinking spirits as the moment of separation drew near, and when at length Mrs. Hamilton departed, after a very tender leave-taking, almost equally tender to each, Frances broke down into tears, and even Catherine, under the influence of the warm, motherly kiss, stifled a convulsive sob.

Mrs. Cooke soon dismissed them. "Miss Hamilton knew the bedroom, and she had better take Miss Irving upstairs; as the tea-bell had rung, she hoped they would not exceed the usual time—they would be able to see without a candle."

"To feel!" said Frances in an aside to her companion, "but never mind, Catherine, habit

is second nature, and it is not the first time I have mounted this noble staircase in the dark."

It was not a noble staircase but a back one, difficult of ascent to a novice, but this was not a circumstance to be much noticed or regretted by Catherine. The sight of their bedroom, in which she could distinguish by the failing light the outline of several small beds, affected her more deeply.

"If so many sleep together," she said, pausing on the threshold, "when has one a chance of being alone?"

"Never!" was the emphatic answer. "I don't know if it is the way in all schools, but here the possibility of any girl being for half an hour by herself is as jealously guarded against as if it was a capital crime. We are not allowed to leave the schoolroom, but for some definite purpose, to be fulfilled in a definite number of minutes. No indulgence here, Catherine, for an unsocial, solitude-loving

spirit—you need never hope to be alone. Come! we must go down-stairs.”

Catherine yielded as to a fate. The last item of information almost paralysed her. Never alone!

Their bed-room opened into an ante-room which had escaped Catherine's attention on entering. It was unfurnished except by boxes and portmanteaux, but it had a long, diamond-paned lattice window, close up to which grew an acacia tree.

Frances paused, and pointed it out to her companion, its limber, leafless branches stirred by the night-wind rustled against the glass.

“In summer-time,” she said, “I like to steal up here, it is the one pretty spot in the house. That acacia—you can't judge of it now—is the very princess of trees! What glorious sunrises, what delicious moons I have seen when one or two of us have stolen out of bed and

chatted snugly though in bodily fear of detection !”

Catherine looked out but it was too dark to see, and Frances drew her on. Having groped their way down stairs, they reached the lighted passage and the dining-room door.

“Keep close to me, Catherine,” whispered Frances, “and do as I do—you will not be introduced to the girls.”

She opened the door and they entered ; it was a strange scene to Catherine. A long narrow table lined on both sides with young girls of every age from eight to eighteen, eating in silence, in a dimly-lighted room, had an almost solemn effect.

Mrs. Cooke, who sat at the head of the table with the French and under teachers, seemed to keep the assembly in awe ; at least not a sound was heard, but that produced by the passing to and fro of the numerous plates of bread-and-butter, piled mountain-high at the commence-

ment of the meal but now reduced almost to a dead level, and that buzz of existence which is always heard where a press of human beings is gathered together.

However, at the opening of the door there was a general movement and turning of heads in the direction of the new-comers. They were summoned by Mrs. Cooke—whose audible voice seemed to startle the air—to the head of the table where two chairs had been left vacant; she also introduced them in a curt, stiff way to the French teacher, a small, bright-eyed woman, with all the ease and vivacity of her nation, and who, moreover, had seen Mr. Fawcett's letter, smiled and gave her hand to the stranger, saying cheerfully—

"Je suis charmée de vous voir, ma chère ! comment ça va-t-il-donc ?"

Catherine knew not one word of French, but she felt to her heart the grace and cordiality of the manner, and the warm grasp of her responsive hand and the sudden sparkle of the

before gloomy eyes testified to her comprehension. The reception of the English teacher was rather timid than cold.

Frances was welcomed on all sides by covert nods and smiles, but the repast before them needed a show of attention and they accordingly applied themselves to it. The tea was cold and the bread and butter almost exhausted, but neither of them were disposed to eat; Catherine indeed, conscious that every eye on the opposite side of the table was levelled on her face, flinched under the scrutiny and could scarcely have eaten had she been starving. She might defy the tyranny of her aunt, but to defy the stare of a file of school-girls, and every one a stranger, was impossible. The indignant color flushed her brow, she put down her cup untasted, and obeyed with pleasure the signal given for departure.

The next half-hour was one of recreation, when the young ladies were released from all restraint but the very feeble restraint of the

under teacher's presence. The season preventing any open air exercise the school-room was of necessity their play-ground.

The moment the dining-room was closed the effect was immediate; shouting and pushing the late repressed, well-ordered crew rushed pell-mell to the school-room. There a division ensued; some of the elder girls gathered round Frances, who introduced Catherine to them, but she half proud and half-shy made by no means a favourable impression. She very soon withdrew from the uncongenial group and retreating to a distant corner moodily surveyed the scene.

The greater number had pushed back tables and chairs, clearing as large a space as possible, and commenced a riotous game of blind-man's-buff. Laughing and talking at the very pitch of their voices, and playing off on each other the roughest practical jokes, they certainly seemed to set at defiance the reputed delicacy and tenderness of their sex. Now and then

when the Babel rose to a more stunning height the teacher, who sat gathered up in a corner of the room in order to save her garments from the depredations of trampling, careless feet, would raise an abortive cry for order unheard amidst the din, and which would have been unheeded had it been heard.

Others were crouched over the fire, dull and low in spite of the cold, some trying to read or learn by its light and that of the two candles placed on the high mantel-piece for safety and the flames of which were swayed backwards and forwards by the motion of the game; the rest, most of them children, were simply engaged in "trying to get warm," and preserving themselves from collision.

Every face was strange to the observer but that of Frances, and even that looked almost unfriendly as she stood laughing and chatting in the centre of her little group. The tumult bewildered her; she seemed to realise in that scene how utterly alone and forlorn her condition was:—was there anyone beyond that

school-room who cared more for her individually—with whom she had more sympathy—than those within?

It was well for her over-wrought feelings that the half hour in which alone she could indulge them with impunity, was near its close. The same gong she had heard before pealed presently above the ever-increasing tumult, and silenced it as if by magic.

The room was put in hasty order, the fire-worshippers rose unwillingly from before their feeble God, and each member of the community turned to the book-shelves to seek out the volumes for the next day's lessons.

Two superior teachers, exclusive of "Madame," (as school-girls always call their French governess,) reappeared, and summoned their respective classes to the tables at which they sat with needlework. A deep quiet then reigned, broken only by a few occasional remarks from the governesses amongst them-

selves, or from the elder and more favoured students.

Catherine took a seat at the same table as Frances, and occupied herself with looking over the books with which she and her companions had covered it. Within them, thought she, were those stores of knowledge so long closed against her, so earnestly desired to be possessed ; and she turned the leaves of French grammars and German dictionaries with an emotion of reverential awe. The English works produced a contrary feeling : she was surprised to find them of so simple and elementary a character, intended as they were for the first class of the school : was History studied only in these abridged and condensed forms ? and was question and answer the most desirable mode of instruction for all ages and capacities, as well as for the childish and immature ?

The entrance of Mrs. Cooke aroused her from

her speculative musing over Goldsmith's "Rome." It was not usual for the lady of the establishment to spend her evenings in the school-room; she did so occasionally, sitting with her class like the other teachers, and, when in bland humour, conversing with those whose studies were or seemed to be concluded.

In the present instance Catherine was the primary object of the visit, and after a few desultory remarks to the others, and a short silence, during which she plied a fine piece of embroidery, she turned her attention fully upon the new comer. She opened the conversation by remarking—

"I should like, my dear Miss Irving, to understand matters a little more exactly, before we begin to morrow."

Catherine looked up. The statement was a general one that seemed to need no answer.

"This is the first time you have ever been at school?" pursued Mrs. Cooke.

Catherine responded—

"Yes."

Frances who had a slate before her wrote—"pray say, ma'am, Catherine!" and directed her attention to the hint.

"And you have been sadly neglected at home? what a pity! it is so difficult at your age to make up for lost time."

"I will try however!" said Catherine, with an intonation of decision that made every one look up.

Mrs. Cooke neither liked her tone nor expression, but as there was nothing very tangible to censure she let it pass.

"Let me consider!" she continued, "I think I am right in understanding Mr. Fawcett that you know nothing of French?"

Catherine felt indignant and irritated. It might be an ordinary thing to subject a new

pupil to such an inquisition, but she felt it ought to have been in private, and every separate interrogatory stung her to the quick. Was she to lay bare her ignorance before those tittering girls?

Mrs. Cooke paused for a reply. Catherine felt compelled to confirm that lady's belief.

"Nor of Italian? nor of German even?"

"I know no language but my own," replied Catherine in a voice that trembled with repressed feeling.

Whether it were want of perception or positive cruelty seemed dubious, for Mrs. Cooke still persevered.

"You have much to learn indeed! In regard now to what we may more properly call accomplishments! you know something of music, I hope, and perhaps you draw?"

At this crisis Catherine's endurance gave way. With her hands strained together upon the table, and her large glittering eyes fixed full on Mrs. Cooke's face, she said in a clear

thrilling voice that attracted every ear in the room—

“I will tell you what *I do* know, that will be easier than to tell what I do not. I can read and write, I know a little about arithmetic. That is all. Of music I know not one note from another, nor of languages a single word. But I can learn, that is what I have come for, and I am willing to begin at once.”

Mrs. Cooke was astonished. Before she had settled what tone to adopt, Catherine had resumed—

“Yet that is not quite all I can do. I have never learnt to draw, but I can draw, nor am I quite ignorant of history, for I have read out of my uncle’s library both Hume and Gibbon.”

The girls looked at each other. They had seen these works in the libraries of their relatives, but they had never associated with them the possibility of their being ever read.

Mrs. Cooke under the influence of Cather-

ine's decided tone and flashing eyes, contented herself with a forcible representation of the vulgarism of such marked enunciation, and the general and lamentable want of lady-like softness and respect for superiors which Miss Irving had already manifested. However she generously attributed these evils to the same source whence sprung her ignorance of languages and music, and doubted not the ameliorating effect of "time and tuition." Catherine listened with considerable indifference to the hope expressed, and with too a sentiment of some contempt for the speaker ; for, apart from any manifestations of character, there were several slight grammatical inaccuracies in Mrs. Cooke's address, and though Catherine had not been drilled by Murray, Hume had disciplined both ear and taste to a critical nicety. It was an infinite relief to her feelings when Mrs. Cooke rose, made her stately *adieux*, and took her leave for that day of the school-room.

At eight o'clock supper was brought in by a servant ; it consisted of a quarter of a slice of bread and butter for each person, and the privilege of a drink of toast and water. It was soon despatched and then followed prayers.

The young ladies did not kneel on the floor, but on chairs with their faces to the wall, the blank, green-coloured surface of which offered irresistible temptation to such as were fortunate enough to possess a lead pencil.

They used their privilege during the rapid reading of a very brief prayer ; others, deprived of this resource, conveyed their sentiments to each other by an expressive pantomime. This farce concluded, for the teacher read as though her life depended on accomplishing the task in a certain number of seconds, ceremonious *adieux* were exchanged and the young ladies dismissed to their bed-rooms. A quarter of an hour was the period allowed for undressing. As they were all extremely cold and

most of them in low spirits at the late change from home, they were comparatively quiet and well ordered. The chief employment as long as the candle remained, was the production from the bottom of their trunks of rich cakes and other dainties, which they offered generously on all sides, and a vast store of which was granaried behind their individual pillows for consumption and recreation in the dark.

Catherine having nothing of the kind to return declined by turns all the offers that were made her, and watched with some surprise the manifestations of keen enjoyment which escaped them during their delectation. Undoubtedly rich plum-cake and preserved fruits were pleasant to the taste, but the pleasure of her companions amounted to ecstasy.

Miss Fletcher, the under teacher, fetched away the candle before any one but Catherine was in bed, for Frances was detained by

certain devotional duties with which her friend dispensed. Left without appeal in the dark, the young ladies scrambled into bed as they best could, heaping all their clothes upon their couches for warmth ; and then the consumption of the reserved feast became very audible. They enlivened it with conversation. They talked of the "parties" they had given or attended during the vacation, how they had been dressed, what was the price of their adornments, and who had been their cavaliers. These latter they occasionally described, they repeated the flat and common-place compliments which had been paid them, and stoutly contested the absolute sincerity of each. If their cavaliers had been polite their school fellows were rude ; the retailed compliments of some were received with bursts of laughter and coarse ridicule, dresses were disparaged, personal short-comings alluded to, and the eight were soon in the heat of a quarrel.

Frances, who, in order to indulge a quiet

cry, was feigning to be asleep, was called upon to settle some disputed point, while Catherine who had listened with feelings now at their climax exercised a powerful self-control not to launch into words the overwhelming scorn and contempt to which they had excited her, Frances, by a well-balanced mixture of rail-lery, reproof and sympathy succeeded in lulling the commotion. Sulky apologies and unwilling concessions were made and received, and shortly after, probably fatigued by the energy of the debate, the eight young ladies subsided into slumber.

CHAPTER VI.

It is not my intention to enter into an account, of each day as it passed at "Broughton Hall." Passing over the details of the first three months, we will look back and take a concise view of what Catherine Irving's position had become in that time.

Long before that period had elapsed the honour had been accorded her of being considered the cleverest girl in the school. It was a fact indeed so obvious that to have disputed or denied it would have been palpably absurd, and they fell very far short of the truth when they characterised their school-fellow as "clever." Inasmuch as the part must be contained in the whole Catherine was clever; but she was more than this, her

abilities placed her within the charmed circle of genius. At school she found some work for those powers the strength of which had been so long controlled. Intellect, duty and necessity all combined to make Catherine an impassioned student. In her new situation too she developed a remarkable aptitude for languages. This is a common phrase but it includes a great deal. It necessitates (I put this foremost), a musical ear, a prompt perception of rhythm and harmony; a capacity for analysis and a keen and almost intuitive discrimination, which at the same time must not impair the mind from being able to grasp principles in their entire and synthetical bearings. Moreover not only is it imperative that the memory should be strong and exercised, but an active, vigorous imagination must lend its efficient aid, and finally there must be an energy that scoffs at difficulties, and a perseverance that sustains the labour till the end.

All this Catherine possessed and her progress was proportioned. Besides she gave herself no recreation, she had small notions of resting-places till the goal was won. Consequently three months did much for her. It placed her in M. Chambolle's first class, and far ahead of most of her fellow pupils, even though they had been learning French for years. Those who know how, for the most part, French is taught in English schools and how an ordinary school-girl pursues the study, will not think this assertion incredible. Before the epoch of M. Chambolle, Mrs. Cooke had not been fortunate in her masters; no doubt they had been capable, but they had not thought it worth while to struggle against the inveterately bad pronounciation, the confused ignorance, the gross carelessness and indifference of their pupils. To teach French with the hope of its ever being mastered by the different classes of blundering, perplexed and frivolous girls who gathered round their table, and whose

worst mistake was not so disheartening in itself as in what it revealed, seemed vain, and they gave it up in despair. They contented themselves therefore with setting tasks and hearing them, and correcting without explaining. But unfortunately for M. Chambolle's personal ease he had a conscience; he could not hear a word mispronounced but he must have it right; yes, even if he and the defaulter went over with it a hundred times; and if, as was next to a dead certainty, when the same word occurred again in the next page, it was again mispronounced, he never gave up in despair but fought the battle all over as before. To be sure it was partly a matter of sensation as of principle; it was torture to him to hear "*la langue la plus delicate du monde*" murdered so ruthlessly, and he flinched under it palpably; habit would not blunt his ear. But he went beyond this, he tried to interest his pupils in an examination of the base and structure of language; he dilated upon it

as a philosopher ; he held it up to them as a science. Vain labour ! A suppressed giggle or a stifled yawn subdued his zeal, a reiterated error crushed his hopes. But at last in Catherine Irving he got a pupil to his heart's content, and he showed it. With a smile of radiant complacency he beat time to her faultless reading ; and, inspired by her air of profound attention and look of quick intellect, expatiated and explained in a manner that proved his desert of a seat in the Academy. He taught Italian also, and the two hours spent twice a week with him were among the most delightful Catherine had ever known. If her decided superiority made her the favourite of her masters, it is superfluous to say it had the contrary effect with her school-fellows. The well deserved praises of M. Chambolle rankled in their hearts ; her unattainable position moved at once their envy and dislike.

Nor was Catherine conciliating. If they

had only been dull she would generously have commiserated them, but it was rather inanity and frivolity that stood in their way than natural incapacity, and for that she could not conceal her contempt. Her early life had instilled too a leaven of bitterness in her nature, and she satirized her companions without any restraint of benignity.

Standing above them all, she felt it, and though she would have scorned to have paraded her superiority, she made no secret that she knew it. It was not only M. Cham-bolle who honoured and delighted in her, there was not a single master whose favour her talent did not win. Music seemed a second native tongue to her. The severe professor who taught this as an *accomplishment* to others, seeing of what Catherine was capable, disciplined her in it as in an *art*, and she was an apt disciple. He told her indeed that, with her distinguished gifts, if she should ever think of making a profession of music the road

to an honourable fame lay open to her. Catherine's cheeks flushed at the words, already she saw then a road to independence, but the next moment the conviction struck home that that was not the kind of distinction which she aspired to have. Susceptible as she was to the influence of music, and capable of exercising it, it was by no means the ruling passion with her. Of the two, Catherine would have made a better artist than musician, for her enthusiasm for the one exceeded even her enthusiasm for the other. Miss Louisa Cooke soon found she had little to teach her. It was absurd to give copies to one who could create, or for a mere drawing-mistress to try and train an embryo artist.

Yet, I doubt whether Catherine would ever have been great, even under proper discipline, either in music or art. She could not sufficiently have concentrated herself upon a single point. Her restless desires that wandered to all points, could never have been brought into

the necessary subservience. The very breadth of talent and of nature, which made her capable and desirous of so much, in different departments, was antagonistic to perfect success in any. Perfection, in any pursuit, necessitates concentration. It is a close-hedged pathway that leads to it. It must be followed up, not only with might, but with "all thy might."

There must be no turning aside for a moment to the right hand or to the left; the hand must not have the minutest fraction of its energy exhausted by using any other tool, or the eye be even, for an instant, bewildered by gazing at any other object.


Literature was the thing that chiefly attracted Catherine, and round which her plans and desires, for the most part, revolved. Beyond her enjoyment in any other pursuit, was her enjoyment in books. The field was widening, not only was she learning to get at the kernel of the French and Italian classics,

but she had commenced, under a very cross, but very adequate master, to dig down the sturdy barriers which separated the student from the enjoyment of German literature.

We must not forget, however, the more rudimental part of education. Mrs. Cooke superintended the English studies, and she performed this duty very well. Not that she was a woman of thorough education or much personal information, but she had a happy tact of directing studies which she herself had never pursued, and of pointing out the road which she herself had never trod. In regard to her, Catherine was unfortunate. "Madame," might make an idol of her, and her masters do her justice, but Mrs. Cooke neither liked her nor concealed her dislike—she had seldom a chance of just complaint—Catherine exceeded her requirements. The ground of her dislike was her pupil's superiority. She felt herself sensibly below her, and was well aware that no manifestation of character, no seeming how-

ever plausible, no little professional subterfuge, no personal deficiency, escaped her pupil's observation. Among other points of self delusion, Mrs. Cooke esteemed herself a French scholar, and during those hours when that language was professed to be spoken in the school-room, expected her pupils to address her in it, and essayed to answer in the same. The result was irresistible to one who had a keen sense of the ludicrous. If the phrase were one step beyond the very threshold of the "Child's first Vocabulary," Mrs. Cooke was fairly at sea. Then arose a natural conflict between the necessity of giving an appropriate answer to what she had not understood, and that of understanding it before she gave it. Her usual *ruse* was to profess not to have heard, that her dull ear might, at least, have the benefit of repetition; and if that failed, and circumstances refused to help her to a guess, her last resource was to accuse the speaker of using such bad French that it was

unintelligible to perceptions such as hers. On the other hand, when she chanced to understand, and an answer beyond a monosyllable was necessary, her perplexity was painful, and when at length, after hard conception, she delivered herself of a reply, it left no room for surprise, that the French of her pupils should stand out of the reach of her comprehension. The facts were sufficiently ridiculous in themselves, but when in spite of them, she made such a firm profession of a knowledge of the tongue she mutilated so distressingly, they seemed to Catherine fair game for her contempt. On one occasion, indeed, when conversation had led to the subject, Mrs. Cooke incidentally informed her first class that, in early life, she had been French teacher in a school. The ideas this astounding statement suggested of the state of the teacher's efficiency, and the piteous condition of her pupils, as well as her own dire self-deception, was too much for Catherine, especially when aided by an



expressive glance from Frances, and her forced gravity yielded to an uncontrollable burst of laughter. The whole class, Frances excepted, looked scandalised; Mrs. Cooke, pale with suppressed passion, for the laugh was not to be misunderstood, sternly demanded an explanation. There was a suspension of labour—a dead pause over the whole room. Catherine felt the emergency of her position, and controlling herself, which was somewhat difficult, as her active imagination was still busy with the ludicrous details of the idea presented, maintained a respectful silence. It would have been policy in Mrs. Cooke to pass the offence over, but instead of doing so, she reiterated her inquiry with an air of judicial severity. Catherine, conscious she could not quite acquit herself of blame, apologised for her offence, but fenced off an explanation, not so much out of personal consideration — she was quite capable of defying that—but in regard to her governess's feeling. Mrs. Cooke refrained

from insisting, contenting herself with dismissing the delinquent from the class, but from that time her dislike became more active. She proved it as such minds do. She talked perpetually *at* her pupil, often descanting to other classes when Catherine was within hearing, or to the members of her own, on "the misfortune it was when young ladies were *too* clever"—"when they thought more of themselves than they would ever persuade other people to think of them"—"when they were above their teachers *in their own eyes*," etc., etc., etc. If Catherine left by chance a book about, Mrs. Cooke would order her to replace it with the remark—"that she supposed she was too much of a genius to keep her things in order;" or, when it was her turn to be the monitor of the week, that "she was afraid the office was below her talents."

Vulgar taunts these, almost below contempt; but then a well-pleased smile sat on all the lips of her companions, and Catherine, young and impassioned, felt the unworthy insults and

the sneer of her fellow-students with a keenness which pride even could not wholly blunt.

"Frances," said she, as during one of the periods of recreation, she walked up and down with her friend in the grounds, after the occurrence of a scene of the kind thus described—"I wonder if my turn will ever come to be happy? I longed to come to school, and now I long to leave it; it never occurred to me when I used to think of it, as the one thing to be desired, that malice and meanness would meet me there too, and embitter all my pleasures. I expect, as one goes through life, they are always cheated in this way."

"Life is a cheat, I believe certain philosophers say," returned Frances, in that tone of carelessness she was fond of adopting, for it was not often she showed all or half of what she felt; "and Solomon does not say much better. We must e'en take it as it comes."

"Oh!" said her companion, fervently, "I

can't bear your indifference, Frances. Do rouse up ; I wish you felt as I do."

"I do," said Frances, with more warmth ;
"I think Mrs. Cooke extremely little, and the whole herd of girls intolerable. There what more can you ask of a zealous friendship?"

"Oh ! I didn't want assuring your sympathies went with me in this matter. It's not that so much that troubles me, at least it *shall* not. But, Frances, you seem to take things so easily ! True, the past has been easy enough for you to take, but you don't trouble yourself about the future. Now what do you mean to do ?"

"Do ! nothing, I'm very much afraid. I don't see any path in particular marked out for me. I'm clever, but not clever enough to distinguish myself. I shall live at home, I dare say, until I chance to marry—if I ever do chance. A sort of every-day humdrum, profoundly uninteresting vista opens before me when I try to look a-head."

"And do you mean to submit to it?"

"Submit to it! Yes, of necessity. What would you have me do? If I had the taste to play the Corinne, I've not the power; and, moreover, in London it would not answer. We should have, to say the least, neither the capital nor the crown. Come now, Catherine, what do you mean to do—seeing that you are quite determined to do something?"

"Well, I mean to *live*," returned Catherine, with decision. "I mean to get into society, where one can see the *action* of existence; where it is doing, and not thinking; feeling and knowing, not conjecturing; and I want to take my part in the strife and conflict—I want to have all my capacities at work—all my powers at full stretch—I want to feel life as it passes." *

"I don't know where you are going then," said Frances; who chose to take the rational side of the question. "Do you know any

select spot where existence is so concentrated and intense, and life such hearty work? Pardon me, *mon enfant*; but young girls can't often choose their whereabouts; they are, for the most part, obliged to sit down where Fate places them; and as for all this individual strife and conflict, that seems to me to depend very much on circumstances we can't control."

"My plan is this," persisted Catherine; "when I leave school, shall I not be tolerably accomplished? I mean to work, while I am here, like a galley slave. Then I shall look about for a situation; and I will only take one where I think I stand a chance of seeing life and society. It shall be abroad, for I'm neither English in feeling nor by birth, and I long to be quit of the country. Is not that idea practical?"

"Perhaps; it remains to be proved. But after all, granting you get into society after

your taste, it may not ask you to take a share in its life and warfare. Circumstances may keep you only a looker-on."

"Trust me," returned Catherine, "for taking my part ! I will be no mere looker-on. Do you suppose I shall not influence others, and be influenced in my turn ? That no claim will be ever made upon my powers of loving, and hating, and suffering, and resenting ? Only let me have a sphere, only give me a chance, and I will make the best of it."

Frances shook her head.

"I am never quite clear about your meaning, Catherine. After all I don't know what you wish to aim at. Yours are such general terms."

"Of course they are, when everything is distant and therefore vague ; but to be honest, my aim goes not one step beyond self. I want to be happy ; and I mean, so far as I can, to try to become so. I know I have talents, and I want people, whose admiration is worth

having, to know it too, and openly acknowledge it; I want to bring them into direct contact with my fellow-beings, and to see their influence at work. But that will not be enough," pursued Catherine, with increasing enthusiasm; "I would have those about me admire me because I had done something that all the world allowed to be admirable. I mean to write some day, and get myself a reputation. I think I shall be able to make people *feel*."

"And will you sit down then content?" said Frances.

"Content!" repeated Catherine; "I'm afraid I shall never be content. As soon as one thing is got I shall want another, higher up, farther off still. I should like to try everything by turns. I should like to go down every road that promises enjoyment, and to test every supposed pleasure under the sun. I should like to exhaust them all without exhausting myself."

Frances was silent. She was deliberating

whether she were called upon to dispute such opinions. Presently she said—

“I wish Arnold were here to tell you how very different your plan of life is from what it ought to be. I wonder if you will be allowed to carry it out?”

“I know what Mr. Fawcett would say,” replied Catherine; “he would aim a heavy blow on the very crown of my pride. I can’t understand the life he leads, I have not much sympathy with his principles. He looks beyond where my eye reaches; and though I have a sort of theoretic admiration of his views of things, I have no desire to become his disciple.”

“Then you don’t comprehend them!” exclaimed Frances, with unusual warmth; “give me to stand on the same point where he stands and I shall not care to displace any one; I wouldn’t then change places with you, Catherine, even if you had realised every wish.”

“ Well, Mr. Fawcett would say, I suppose, the power was your own. We shall see, Frances, it seems we both have an aim, we shall see who will attain it.”

Frances shook her head. She had a conviction that Catherine would labour to compass her worldly schemes with an energy she would never exert to gain a firm footing in the straight and narrow way, and while her friend stepped ever nearer till she had reached her goal, she would permit circumstance and habit to push her perpetually farther from what she esteemed the only good.

In describing Catherine's progress, we have made no mention of Frances, though they were constant companions. For the ground which the one was treading had already been passed over by the other, not indeed with the same rapid and decisive steps; it had been taken by easy stages in the course of years, and the final result was less brilliant and conclusive. There was a kind of mental indolence

about Frances; she had sufficient talent to reach a point even far beyond the ordinary standing of a school girl with very little trouble to herself, and she contented herself with reaching it. The power which would have led her farther still she suffered to lie dormant; sometimes an influence from without, or an excited impulse from within moved her to exertion for a time, but such spasmodic energy is of little avail, it generally leaves its subjects weaker than it found them. It was the same in other things. Frances's theories and practice were far as the poles asunder; she had received, under her cousin's teaching and example, the most refined and elevated ideas of moral and religious excellence; she desired to embody these principles herself. But Frances sometimes desired what she scarcely attempted to pursue, and looked longingly to a point she scarcely attempted to reach. At the same time that the figures of the Christian warfare stirred her imagination, and the combatants seemed to her judgment the only true heroes, she lived a life

—innocent and amiable, people would have said—but which she both knew and felt to be vain and worthless. It must not be supposed that this discrepancy made her unhappy, it was not always present to her mind, and even when it did occur, it was only in moments of extreme depression or extreme exultation that she estimated her position aright.

She admired Catherine for her energy of purpose and pursuit, she inwardly wondered at a temperament which maintained constantly a degree of intensity hers only reached at the rarest and for very brief intervals. Moreover, she acted up to her avowed principles. She pursued the object she professed to esteem, and Frances respected her consistency. As for her talents, no petty feeling of rivalry prevented her from doing them the fullest justice, Catherine had no such enthusiastic an admirer as herself. It may be asked, did Frances love her? She had put the same question, doubtfully, to herself many times during the last

three months. Catherine's freedom from any of the multiform phases of meanness or untruthfulness, her sincerity and earnestness, her deep sense of favours received, her dauntless championship where she imagined the existence of oppression were all loveable points, and Frances appreciated them. But on the other hand there was a proud self-reliance, and an avowed self-seeking which had something repellent in it. Frances always felt that though Catherine might prize her society and affections, having them, in a great degree, at command ; she could also have dispensed with them. They were not essential to her. She was bent on working out her own course ; if any one offered her aid or sympathy, by the way, she would take it gratefully ; but she would have pursued, and probably gained her object without it.

At the same time Frances felt that, together with this independence of others, there existed a passionate warmth of heart that seemed far

to exceed the capacities of her own nature. There was an apparent incongruity here that puzzled her. She was not yet competent to a searching analysis of character.

Catherine's heart was large in its capabilities of affection ; but, unfortunately, her life had been such that no object had been offered to fill it. Hate, and defiance, and bitterness had exercised its strength, indifference and contempt had taught her to hold her passionate impulses in check. She was not one of those tender, affectionate natures with whom love is a necessity, and who, in default of something better, love the inferior or the ideal ; she, cut off from what would have satisfied her, exalted no trifle into importance to make it worthy of her regard. To a certain degree, she bowed to her circumstances ; but though her affections had been unexercised, they had not been stifled. She had kept them alive.

The untaxed strength, which had not been lavished upon fancies, was restrained within

her heart, its deep throbs announced its vitality. In regard to her friend, Mr. Fawcett, and her school-fellow, Frances, neither of them were calculated to draw towards themselves this pent-up passionateness. After all, with the first, Catherine's acquaintance was but partial, their intercourse had been very limited. She owed him a great obligation, not only for the chief service he had rendered her, but for the kind and generous interest he seemed to take personally in her. For the principles, too, he professed, and, she believed, practised, she had, as she had said, a theoretic admiration; but here, with gratitude and esteem, Catherine stopped short. There were she felt few meeting points between them; while Mr. Fawcett condemned her plans and views, she had no interest in his. His character was altogether lifted out of her sphere of sympathy, it had but a very cold charm for her. Nor was Frances competent to a conquest of her heart. Her feelings towards her did not

partake of the nature of an ardent school-girl friendship. Frances was dear to her, as, indeed, her kindness and amiability entitled her to be, and there was, to a certain degree, a sympathy between them. So far as that sympathy went Catherine loved Frances, but inasmuch as that sympathy failed, as the one was content to sit down on the very threshold of a path the other desired to pursue to the end, and talked of life and things in general in a spirit of indolent submission to circumstance, instead of being fired by the principle of aggression and self-distinction, which animated the other, there was a want of heartiness in their friendship. Catherine had often tried, and as often failed to inspire Frances with the full spirit of her own enthusiasm. In reading together their favorite authors, Frances's languid admiration irritated her. While she, possessed of the idea, was raised to the same pitch of divine frenzy as the poet, Frances contented herself with an acknowledgment of its beauty. The

"Fairy Queen," was quite a stumbling block between them. Catherine had done her best, she had read, recited, discussed, and eulogised her favorite passages, but she could obtain no greater appreciation from Frances than the concession—

"I like a stanza here and there."

Frances in her turn laughed at her friend.

"Why, Catherine," she said, on one occasion, when she had been reading aloud from '*Télémaque*,' the description of the death of Hercules, "you will wear yourself out! What avails all that ardour and enthusiasm? I wish you had had a select audience just now, it is a positive shame that it should all have been wasted upon me."

Catherine closed the book.

"Frances, I would rather live one of my years than five of yours."

Frances laughed and coloured.

"Remember, Catherine, I am never so insensible as with you. Your extreme enthusi-

asm puts out mine, as the greater does the lesser light. The moment you begin to expatiate my heart shuts itself up. I listen like a stone."

Catherine was silent.

"Moreover," added Frances, "'*Télémaque*,' is quite out of my range of sympathies. Whatever it may be in itself, to me it is nothing but a school book. I could as soon fall into raptures over the alphabet as it."

"If you were to claim my admiration for any thing you liked, you would not find me a stone."

"That is different, but I don't know I should feel inclined to claim it. I shouldn't like to offer my little feeble flame to be swallowed up in your blazing ardour."

"I can't understand that feeling," returned Catherine, warmly. "It would be a delight to me to find somebody who admired what I admired with a stronger admiration, and could find better words to express it. I should be

personally grateful to them, it would be enough to make me love them."

"I am not fond of feeling inferiority," said Frances.

"Inferiority! That is the very last idea that would occur to me. All that I should think of would be—here is one that is capable of doing better justice to this man or this thing than I am—and I should rejoice for the man's sake. If I thought about myself at all, I should rejoice that I could rejoice."

Frances laughed.


"Well, I suppose then I must be a very miserable egotist. No doubt I am. One thing I admire in you, Catherine, is that you so entirely lose the idea of yourself in your paroxysms of enthusiasm. You have been born out of your time. You were meant for a Greek Pythoness."

"I don't think," said Catherine, laughing, "I should have disliked the office, granting I had believed in myself."

Frances never did herself justice. Nothing was less to be relied upon than what she said of herself, and Catherine soon discovered this, and disputed her self-conclusions warmly. These disputes were naturally amicable ; on the whole, Catherine and Frances enjoyed each other's society, and did pretty fair justice to each other's character.

CHAPTER VII.

WITH this outline of their school life we may pass on. It now wanted but three weeks to the holidays, and in the school-room of Broughton Hall there was but one subject of discussion—home. There was no one more enthusiastic in her delight than Frances Hamilton. Every day as it passed brought a fresh accession to her high animal spirits ; each description which she gave to Catherine of her home pleasures during the summer vacation grew more glowing. She succeeded in infusing something of her own spirit into her friend. Catherine began to count the days, and to anticipate their ending. True, she had not the right that Frances had to take her share in these expected enjoyments—it was



favour and benevolence that bestowed them upon her. But to her mind, to revolt from receiving what was delicately and generously bestowed, was a meanness, and she would school her pride. The humiliation, after all, she concluded, was less to take subsistence from the willing hand of Mr. Fawcett, than to receive it from the grudging heart of Sarah Irving. At least, she had no alternative. The sense of obligation should not be allowed to press so heavily on her heart as to prevent her from tasting the good that was offered.

“No,” she often thought, as she reflected on these things, “I will take what is given me. I will not be ungrateful. My pride shall not be allowed to throw away any chance of happiness I may get. I must humble myself to receive what the generous will give, or I should be helpless for the future.”

The season itself produced a genial influence. It was the first time Catherine had seen summer in the country. In spite of the confinement of

school, she was not shut out from all its pleasures. During the stated periods of recreation, the clear sky, the balmy air, the freshness and fulness of the foliage, made the play-grounds a pleasant retreat. Even the daily walks, which at first had been so intolerable, become softened by habit, were now far from disagreeable. If the neighbourhood had no claims to picturesque beauty, its meadows intersected by the Ouse, and its fertile corn-fields had a quiet charm of their own. And, at least, its broad horizon, and the invigorating pureness of the air, were points of merit prized to the full by the city girl. She rejoiced in the sweep of heaven's wide concave, as she trod the level earth, and drank in the untainted air with a sensible pleasure. Frances, with whom Catherine always walked on these occasions, never found her so delightful a companion as then. Exhilarated by the exercise and fresh air, she would often amuse and charm her friend by giving the rein to her imagination, and sketch-

ing all sorts of fancy pictures. These were the times when she repeated her favourite poetry with the most exquisite and appropriate skill, nor did she let Frances into the secret that some of the verses she praised so enthusiastically claimed no other parentage than her own.

“When we do but once get to that blessed home of mine,” said Frances, one day, as they were returning from a walk, which they had wiled away in the manner described, “I shall take care to tell Arnold how little he knows you yet. You must tell him one of your stories, recite to him your beloved selections from the “Fairy Queen;” in short, show him yourself under your Pythoness aspect. I mean him to admire you as I do; indeed, for that matter, more than I do, for he will do you better justice.”

The opportunity of fulfilling these and sundry other intentions came at length. The day of departure arrived, and Mrs. Hamilton with it, to fetch them home. During the six months

they had received but one visit from her, and not even one from Mr. Fawcett. His engagements had been such as to prevent him from carrying out the intention he had expressed at parting, his letters had been to Frances but very inadequate compensation.

“However,” she said, as she sprang gleefully into the coach, “it was all the better now. It increased the delight of re-union.”

“Is Catherine broken-hearted at leaving her school-fellows and teachers ?” asked Mrs. Hamilton, turning with an arch smile to the silent girl.

Catherine shook her head, while Frances answered for her. The truth was, she was lost in a vague conjecture as to whether she would ever feel sure, as sure as Frances was, of having a chief place in any human heart. Mrs. Hamilton, however, would have her talk ; all that she said herself she addressed equally to both, and in recounting certain home plans and home improvements spoke as if they were as much a

matter of concern to the one as to the other. She talked of the present beauty of the garden, of the magnificent promise of the mulberry-tree, of a comfortable bench which had been placed under it, and "where it was delightful to sit and read," of a small conservatory which had been built, and of numerous other etceteras all of deep interest to her auditors.

"And what do you think," she added, "Arnold has been doing to amuse himself these long winter nights? Why, learning German, and rubbing up his music, and I shouldn't wonder if he were to beat you both."

Frances laughed.

"He may easily beat me," she said; "but as for Catherine, she is a perfect Agamemnon in her way. She shall examine him in his progress; do you know how far he has got on?"

"Oh! I know very little about it, except the fact that when he has not been sure how

to pronounce a word, he has pocketed his book when he went to the warehouse to consult some clerk there who understands the language. I begin to think though, he turns his leaves a little quicker than he did, and he read me a bewitching little story the other night."

"And the music, ma'am?" asked Catherine.

"He learnt that, my love, when he was a boy, and he never has quite put it aside. He has only been furbishing, as one may say."

"Oh!" cried Frances, "he shall perform this evening, he shall show us his German erudition; how I long to be at home!"

So did Catherine. She liked the idea of the seat under the mulberry-tree; from comparison with other objects she fancied the garden might now look beautiful. She liked equally the idea of hearing Mr. Fawcett read a bewitching German story, or play a hesitating air on the piano. She liked it for the truly

feminine reason that she thought it would be so unlike him.

Frances found the various stages of their journey extremely tedious ; but as everything must come to an end, and it is not essential for us to travel with them, we will pass over the different processes which brought them to the desired point, and bring them there at once. Catherine scarcely recognised the place. It was about six o'clock of a delicious June evening. Over the brilliant blue of the hot summer sky light clouds were throwing their vapour-like drapery. The before garish sun was shedding his softened beams over a landscape, which, though deficient in variety, was rich in cultivation, and in the grateful charm of foliage.

The house itself, with its surrounding gardens, looked changed. It was difficult to identify the magnificent trees in their present excess of beauty, now throwing their broad shadows, in which the minutest leaf seemed

pencilled, on the smooth lawn, with the gaunt repellent forms which had reared themselves with such a ghostly air in the wintry atmosphere. There were now, too, the odorous breath and the multiform hues of flowers to enhance the scene, and in the boughs of the before-mentioned mulberry-tree two rival thrushes were out-vying each other.

Catherine, at this time, only received a general impression of refreshment and pleasure, for she had other claims upon the details of her attention. As the gate opened to admit them, Mr. Fawcett came from the house to meet them. As Frances flew towards him, Catherine had space for her intuitive observation.

“What a pity he is lame!” she thought, with a passionate gush of sympathy; and by a prompt exercise of fancy, she tried to imagine, as she watched his meeting with his cousin, how he would look if he could stand without the support of his crutch, and hold fully erect his tall, finely-proportioned figure. He was

standing in a favourable position, the light fell upon his face with an almost artistic effect, and it was a face that could bear the ordeal; for it was more strictly in conformity with the approved rules of beauty than is often seen, and its expression would have redeemed a plainer one. There was no restlessness or indecision about it; the fine grey eyes shone with an equal, quiet light, they seemed to look with manly and calm assurance out upon life as upon a problem solved and applied. The lines of the mouth, the marked symmetry of the chin, the fine brow, which ought to have had the right of precedence in our description, and which both the phrenologist and physiognomist would have approved alike, were all in harmony with the general effect. One read at a glance, intellect and nobility. However, I feel bound to say that round his forehead no curls clustered. Nature who had given him so much, had withheld this boon. He wore his dark brown hair, which was barely redeemed from the charge of straightness, by a slight

inclination to wave, as we hear it technically called, after the ordinary fashion of our countrymen. On the whole, though every one allowed Mr. Fawcett to be "gentlemanly," it was only the close and critical observer that did full justice to his appearance.

Catherine did it full justice, perhaps for the first time, during the few moments he was returning Frances's warm greeting, then it was her turn.

Catherine looked anxiously into his face to see if its expression fully corresponded with his kind and almost tender address, she was fully satisfied.

"Thank you! Thank you!" she said, fervently; "now I begin to feel that I shall not be looked upon as an intruder. You look as if you were really glad to have me here."

"And so I am! You may always trust my words, Catherine."

Frances being eager to visit the conservatory, and to discover the improvements, the

three made a tour of inspection of the garden, while Mrs. Hamilton went into the house to quicken the dinner arrangements. Mr. Fawcett watched Catherine with interest, to observe the effect of the last six month's experience; but Catherine, with a sensation of happiness, unusual to her, and produced by the sweet influences which surrounded her, and to the slightest of which she was sensible, was, for the most part, silent. However, the softened lustre of her eyes, and the comparative repose of a face generally so variable and restless pleased her observer.

"I wish she looked always thus," he thought, "and that that which produces it was not a mood but a principle."

The dinner hour was rather a noisy one, for Frances's spirits were exuberant, and she was overflowing with school anecdotes, told with the exaggeration so seductive to a ready wit. Her mother was almost as happy and excited as herself, and Mr. Fawcett attempted no re-

straint upon the hilarity of either. He smiled when they laughed, and threw in an exception now and then to Frances's sweeping caricatures.

"Arnold thinks I exaggerate," said she, in answer to a smiling glance, "but exaggeration is impossible under some circumstances. You cannot conceive to what a length the stupidity of our school-mates goes. Now I will give you an example, Catherine will certify me. Sunday afternoon is spent by the first class in writing religious themes; by the second in writing what they can of the sermon just heard. We will say nothing about the themes, for the gift of original composition may be denied; but the sermon writers! They gather into a group with their slates or paper as the case may be, drawn together by a heavy sense of the emergency of the occasion. The first step is to put down the text; that is the easiest part of the business, for one out of the number is pretty sure to remember where it

was, and then they can copy it out of their Bibles. That accomplished, then comes the tug of war. There is a blank expression in their faces, an air of dejection in their attitudes. The fact is they feel themselves unequal to their necessity. One looks at her neighbour—‘I forget the first head,’ she remarks, with but the faintest glimmer of hope that the other may recollect it,—‘I don’t think there were any heads at all,’ pronounces a third with the most encouraging confidence. This occasions some demur, one half agreeing there were no heads, because they fancy it will be easier to write their sermon without them; the other maintaining that there were, not because they remember any, but they have a vague impression a sermon can’t be a sermon without them. However,” pursued Frances, encouraged by her laughing mother and her cousin’s smile, “we will suppose that they have dispensed with the heads, as I have often known them to do. The field is wide and they

have lost their land-marks. At length there is a quickening amongst them. One says—‘I remember he talked about hope,’ and another has an impression ‘he said something about faith,’ and so they begin their discourse with some meagre sentence wrenched from its context, follow it up by some self-evident proposition innocent of any relation with what went before, and generally before they have done, fall back upon the church catechism. Catherine, do I exaggerate?”

“Exaggerate! no. I should like to give a few touches to the picture, but Mr. Fawcett looks prohibition.”

“I assure you, Arnold, that one Sunday’ Catherine, who had not been to church wrote them a sermon apiece. They were lost in admiration of her genius, ‘why,’ was the universal cry, ‘he really did say that!’ But the merit, the true merit of the performance they never discovered. Catherine preserved their mode of writing, I can’t say style, to an

exquisite nicety. It was really a triumph, they were not one whit better than if they had done them themselves. Poor girls! they were so innocent of the satire, so obliged to their ready satirist!"

Mr. Fawcett looked towards Catherine, her colour rose. "I did not think you so ungenerous," he said.

"Ungenerous!" repeated Catherine, "it was quite allowable. They envied, hated, and to the extent of their power injured me. Mine was no real offence, for they could not understand it. I did them a service and gratified my own feelings, without their knowing it."

"Did you gratify your self-respect?"

"Come, come Arnold," interposed Mrs. Hamilton "I won't have the girls taken to task for such a trifle, and the first day of their coming home too! There's Catherine looking angry and Fanny ready to cry."

"Well," he said, "they must forgive me

if I was too severe. As for you, Frances, I make due allowance for a temper which, in its present state, turns every thing into laughter. In some moods you would not have told the story with such hearty sympathy."

Frances shook her head with a smile. He then turned to Catherine. "Are you angry with me, Catherine?" he asked. "The fact is, I thought you so above all petty revenge or retaliation that I was surprised into what I said. Come, you will forgive an impulsive fault?"

He held out his hand to her. She placed hers frankly within it—

"Well, I can't be angry because you thought me better than I am, but, remember, Mr. Fawcett, I'm not magnanimous. My self-respect is founded on being able to fight my own battles. It will be a hard training that will teach me to receive injuries without resenting them."

After dinner, the piano was opened, and Frances summoned her cousin to a display of his abilities, bribing him thereto by the promise that she would afterwards give him a newly-learnt "Divertissement" of Rossini, and Catherine should sing him a song.

He made no objection. His performance of certain passages in Mendelsohn's overture to the "Midsummer Night's Dream," was not only critically correct, but exquisite as regarded taste and expression. It was not, indeed, brilliant in execution, that is a merit which, though comparatively inferior, is only to be attained by unremitting practice. Frances was eager in her encomiums, and Catherine's somewhat doubtful compliment, was conveyed in the inquiry—

"Do you not sing, Mr. Fawcett?"

"No," he said, smiling; "don't you like what I have been playing?"

"Yes, I like it, it is good music; but I like better to hear the human voice."

"Well, my love," said Mrs. Hamilton, "we hope to hear yours presently. I don't care much for Arnold's music."

And, after Frances had played her effective "divertissement," Catherine made no objection to take her place at the piano.

A girl with a great natural taste for music, with a good master, and three hours' daily practice, may do much in six months. She at least had done much. She had learnt, among other things, how to tutor and direct her native gift of improvisation. On this occasion she played first a simple piece, and then choosing a favourite air, made it the basis of her rare talent. Her variations, expressive almost to the point of being vocal, and reproducing the original theme with a skill at once delicate and powerful, were yet sufficiently irregular to a cultivated ear to betray their source.

Mr. Fawcett watched her with great interest. She had forgotten her listeners. She had but one object; to translate into that finer medium

her fancies as they rose; and as the facile notes responded to her thoughts, and the interpretation became complete, her colour deepened, and her eyes dilated with the conscious triumph. As she concluded, she looked at Mr. Fawcett.

"You see I have not been idle," she said, answering the expression of admiration she read in his face.

"No, indeed. I little knew how much was latent. Catherine, yours is a gift, rather than an accomplishment. Now let me hear you sing."

He took a chair by her side. She found a favourite song and commenced. Her first note proclaimed the quality of her voice. It was a fine contralto, rich and deep, but clear. It was precisely a voice fitted to move and express the passions, and, in the music selected, her master had not lost sight of its individual character. Passing by all the lighter productions of the day, he had culled discriminatingly.

from the masters of the Italian Opera. Such music awoke an eager response in Catherine's nature ; it was a vent for that fervour and intensity of temperament which was always seeking for an outlet ; it offered expression for feelings she might have hesitated to put into words. She gave her power the rein that evening ; her audience showed no signs of aught but absorbed attention, and it was a delight to her to exercise her gift. She was scarcely aware how expressive her music was ; how, as governed by her own enthusiasm, she was throwing open to the penetration of one of her listeners emotions which she herself had never analysed, and aspirations which were vague to her own consciousness. As she suddenly ceased she roused Mr. Fawcett from a grave consideration of the responsibility of his charge, and an anxious speculation as to the probable future of the impassioned musician. The rapturous praises of Mrs. Hamilton, and the exultation of Frances covered his silence at first ;

but Catherine was anxious to hear his opinion.

"I know I sing well," she said; "what is it that you do not like?"

"I do like it; you must be more careful in interpreting my looks."

Catherine was not convinced.

"I have it!" she exclaimed, after a pause of reflection; "I sing with too much expression; you do not, like Mrs. Cooke, think it becoming for a young lady to be too emphatic."

She laughed as she spoke, but there was a touch of wounded feeling in her tone.

"You are wrong, Catherine; you attribute my silence, I see, to a want, whereas it was a superfluity of appreciation that caused it. I don't like misunderstandings, so I will explain. Your mode of singing showed me your heart; you know the source of my anxieties; the more I learn of your character the more solicitous I am that you should be happy."

"Solicitous!" repeated she, with sparkling

eyes; "well, to know that is one means of making me so. Would you have me more insensible?"

"Not if your sensibility had a principle, and I could guarantee your future."

"I shall stand my chance," said Catherine. "I shall, I know, taste life as it passes. But I will never wish myself apathetic even if I am to be miserable. Don't trouble yourself about me, Mr. Fawcett, I feel as if I didn't deserve it. After all, come what may, I would rather have my heart racked and tortured than never moved at all."

He shook his head with a smile. Mrs. Hamilton interposed.

"Come," she said, "we are getting grave again; let us have a turn round the garden."

They went out. They were just in time to watch a glorious sunset. Catherine's spirit rose to exultation.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "these are the moments when I long to do something great. To

find words to express feelings that crowd upon and overpower me, to be able to paint ! I wish I were an artist !”

“ Catherine,” said Mr. Fawcett, archly, “ I know an artist !”

“ Oh ! but he lives in Scotland,” cried Frances, laughing.

“ But he is coming up to London to fight his way,” pursued Mrs. Hamilton. “ It really seems a dispensation of Providence.”

The joke was rather a stale one, and Catherine suffered it only by a stretch of forbearance ; nevertheless, when Frances and her mother had sauntered in another direction, she said to Mr. Fawcett—

“ It is natural for me to feel a deep interest in artists, it is no silly, sentimental nonsense. My father was an artist ; had he lived I might have been one. I think when they are worthy of their art I know how to honour them. What sort of a man is the artist you know ?”

“ I know very little of his qualifications,

but what he tells me himself. I cannot exactly call him a personal friend. I made his acquaintance many years ago when spending some time in Edinburgh. We have kept it up since by an occasional letter, but our intercourse has been very limited."

"Has he any right to call himself an artist?"

"If devotion to art makes an artist, yes. He is an idolater in fact; he has but one idea, and all his powers of mind centre round it; and beyond that, so careful is he of distraction of interest, or of purpose, that it is almost a principle with him to stifle his affections."

"And he is right," was the decisive reply, "if he can shut his heart, so much the better! One must give up something if one means to be great. But what made him take up this profession—was his talent very decisive?"

Mr. Fawcett smiled, but he passed her emphatic judgment over, and proceeded to inform her that the individual in question had been

brought up by an uncle, himself an eminent engraver ; that his predilections had been early developed and assiduously cultivated ; that all that instruction, encouragement, and stimulus could do had been done ; that he had passed several years abroad with every advantage at command, and that since that time he had resided at Edinburgh exhibiting his works in the Royal Academy.

Catherine listened with interest.

"Why is he coming to London," she asked ;
"doesn't he succeed at home?"

"No ; or at least he is dissatisfied with his measure of success, and wishes to try another field. For my own part, I have no doubt, from what I saw of his drawings and sketches some years ago, which was before he went abroad, as well as from what he writes and what I gather from other sources, that he is a man of very superior ability. But he is not calculated to be, to say the least, immediately popular ; his theories are individual, his plans not only

vast but eccentric, and his works are therefore extraordinary, in more points than merit. Then, too, his character and manners are both reserved and singular, he is unconciliating and proud to a degree."

"I am glad of that, he won't suffer people to trample on him then ; but depend upon it, if he is a man of genius he is not as hard as he seems. What is his name ?"

"Erskine."

"How old is he ?" pursued the enquirer ;
"and what does he look like ? Tell me all about him, Mr. Fawcett."

"He is a young man, though I can't vouch for his precise age ; and as for his appearance, it is now four years since I saw him. For the rest, I have told you about as much as I know. I expect him in town every day ; and as he will be sure to pay me a visit, you will have an opportunity of seeing him."

Here the conversation rested, for Frances

and Mrs. Hamilton joined the two, and shortly after they returned to the house.

Catherine's enjoyment of Mr. Fawcett's kindness was not without alloy. He, as a matter of courtesy and duty, had written to Miss Irving to ask her consent to her niece's spending the vacation with them.

The answer had been polite in form, but in matter malicious. It restricted Catherine's visit to one half of the holidays, insisting on her returning home to spend the remainder with her. Mr. Fawcett forbore expostulation, he knew it would only have the effect of strengthening her purpose. Frances and Mrs. Hamilton stoutly maintained that Catherine should not leave them, and she herself was disposed to welcome an opportunity of defying signally her aunt's authority. Its exercise was not to be mistaken, the command breathed nothing but her enmity. Mr. Fawcett, however, argued differently. It was a hard

necessity doubtless, but he advised submission.

"Your aunt has a certain right to demand it, Catherine—yield to it. Don't give her any direct plea against you. If you want encouragement, console yourself with thinking it is greater to perform an irksome duty than to meet the consequences of defying it."

"As for that, I shall not deceive myself. If I go it will be from no sense of duty, except the duty of obeying you. I acknowledge your right, Mr. Fawcett, to tell me what to do, and I yield to that. As for my aunt, she has no right over me, there are no duties between us. I shall solely go to prove my sense of what I owe you."

It was in vain to argue this matter, and it was therefore decided on these grounds. All that could now be done was to make Catherine as happy as possible while she remained.

Mrs. Hamilton was ingenious in finding ways and means. There was no beautiful

spot within an average distance of the metropolis but she took Catherine to see it. Nature can never be vulgarised, and Catherine, as she rejoiced in the glories of the old forests of Epping and Windsor and in the far-famed view from Richmond Hill and in its classic Park, threw off any association that might have marred her enjoyment, and received to the full the impression of their absolute charm. Much however as she prized these excursions, there were home employments she liked equally well. She enjoyed to an extent that she scarcely estimated, a quiet evening walk with Mr. Fawcett. Their friendship was on the increase. If he did not sympathise with her views and feelings he comprehended them, he encouraged her to express them. There was no one to whom she opened her whole heart as to him. In his very disapprobation there was a tenderness and delicacy which almost won her to further confidence. She learnt to understand him better. He had no wish to

compress her talents or her aspirations, he would only have given them a range even wider than she desired. He would have had the Supreme and not Self her ultimate aim, he would have had her labour in time with an eye looking on to Eternity. She was unaccustomed to hear such principles advocated, when advocated she could not gainsay their force, but she was unwilling to admit it.

"Don't persuade me," she said on one occasion in answer to his arguments, "that my plans and aims are little and mean, or I shall lose all heart in pursuing them. I own the truth of all you say, but I don't embrace it. My heart glows while you speak but soon grows cold again. I must try my own way first, I must comfort myself with a little pure personal distinction."

"I hope I may live," he said smiling, "to see the distinction got and then to hear you own, its insufficiency. It is no use arguing

with you, seemingly, until you have put the world to the test. You won't take the experience of others."

"No, I never mean to take any thing for granted, I like to prove things. I don't understand your mode of acting," she added, touching a subject she had long wished to approach, "you seem content to let things go without even trying to attain them."

"What things do you consider I have let go?"

"Well, first the chance of making yourself known. What need have you of a classical education, and taste and talent even in the post you occupy? If it is not right to have no better object than self-distinction, is it right to hide one's light under a bushel? I could not answer to my conscience the shutting up of powers that could have done something better in a counting house."

Mr. Fawcett smiled at her warmth, but it was with rather a painful expression. She

recalled to him his own youthful ardour, when he had looked out into life with feelings akin to her own, when he too had hoped to run a race before the world, though towards a higher goal. At that time he had as little thought to tread the narrow and humble path into which circumstance had led him as had the eager, ambitious girl by his side.

Catherine was gazing at him intently. Her quick eye read something of the truth.

"I am afraid I have been impertinent," she said, "I remember what you said six months ago, and I see now you spoke it of yourself. Don't be angry at my moral deadness, Mr. Fawcett, but I can't help wishing "ought not" had not been quite so stringent with you. You might have done something great, I think."

"Do you? what might I have done?"

"Taught men what their duty was."

"Oh! there are many engaged in that

labour, there are already more teachers than pupils."

"Oh! but they seek to convince, and you would have tried to win. They pronounce and you would have persuaded."

"And should I estimate my chance of success by what it has been with you, Catherine?" he asked smiling.

"Oh! the seed may have been sown though the ground seems so stubborn. It may spring up some day when one least expects it, and you will see me at war with Self and stretching out my arms to duty."

"God grant it," he said fervently, so fervently that Catherine inwardly re-echoed the invocation. She liked him better after this conversation.

If duty and not inclination had made him what he was, there was the charm of heroism in that and her imagination embraced it. Frances too quickened her interest by telling

her some very imperfect statement of his early disappointment, gathered from her mother. Catherine's indignant contempt for the unworthiness of the lady was quite refreshing.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, from the very depths of a heart burning with no qualified views on the subject of the affections, "two things I wish—that her present husband may be mean and sordid, as much below her as she is below Mr. Fawcett, and then she will be miserable; and that it were possible for him to love some one again who was capable of far more than compensation for more than what he fancies he has lost."

Frances smiled.

"I am sorry he will never know your strong sympathy on this subject."

"Oh! the difference between us!" pursued Catherine, with increasing enthusiasm. "I see practically now how little I am. I should have become bitter and hard-hearted, despising and defying the world, and he is good, and

kind, and able to feel an interest in the happiness of other people. From that moment, if I had been he, I should have shut my heart for ever."

"Well, I am glad the scales are beginning to fall from your eyes," responded Frances; "it is quite time—you never have done Arnold justice;" and the two girls, for once in entire accord, exhausted their powers of conjecture, sympathy, and admiration.

Time under these circumstances, passed rapidly.

A fortnight had already expired—there were but a few more days for Catherine. It was the happiest, the most tranquil period she had yet known; that she was appreciated, admired by the little circle, no doubt was a chief constituent of her enjoyment—but there was a purer element in her esteem and regard for Mr. Fawcett.

"That I have known one good, one generous man," she said to him, "will almost make up

for my past experience. It is beginning life with a fair start, and then too, to have him for my personal friend."

In truth, with all her faults, few thoughtful men could have failed to be her friend.

One read her character in her expressive face—genius that had yet to try its strength, restlessness that asked perpetually for satisfaction, and a fervent passionateness, maturing with her years, which neither the rewards of successful genius, nor the satisfaction of a certain object attained would be enough to meet its claims.

On the last night but one which Catherine was to spend with her friends, there was a small gathering of Mr. Hamilton's and Frances's mutual acquaintance. If the little party was intended for her immediate gratification, it failed in attaining its object. Not one of the young ladies, nor their respective parents interested her; pretty, accomplished, or good-natured they might be, but she required

something more. The metal must have an individual stamp before she cared to handle it. After tea the young ladies had walked for some time in the garden, admiring every point which they thought they would be expected to admire. Catherine had found this tour very irksome; she was mated with a young lady whose conversation was rich in extravagant superlatives, and who expressed herself rapturously in praise of "Mr. Fawcett's grounds," as she was pleased to call them. With the grave exception, that her admiration lacked descriptive point, her phrases would have been more suitable in reference to some such scene as the hanging gardens of Babylon than that in which she was. Catherine, who never cared to please those who did not please her, was silent and unsympathetic—her companion considered her "shy." Frances, meantime, was vivacious and agreeable; she knew she had the reputation among her friends of being a charming, clever girl, and she did not think it worth

while, for the expense of a little trouble, to forfeit it. Besides, she had enough genuine amiability to like to contribute her share in making people happy ; nor was she so intolerant of common-place as her friend. On the same principle, when they went in-doors, she opened her piano, invited the young ladies to perform, discussed with them the merits of the last new polkas, and played and sang whatever each requested. Catherine had declined all the solicitations which had been offered to induce her to play, for Mr. Fawcett had not joined in them ; therefore, as he seemed indifferent, she deemed herself at liberty to act as she pleased. She had gained a retired seat, whence she could look out into the garden and overhear Mr. Fawcett's answers to a portly, good-natured gentleman, the father of three of the four young ladies present, who was talking politics, and had just announced his intention "of giving his candid opinion of Lord John Russell." Mrs. Hamilton, with the two mothers of the

party, were deep in conversation, which, having taken a domestic turn, was naturally of absorbing interest ; the girls were grouped round the piano, together with a young man, the brother of the musical trio, himself a musician, and paying assiduous court to Frances. Catherine surveyed each party by turns, and as the interest excited left her in full possession of her senses, she detected presently a knock at the street-door. It was a peculiar summons, abrupt and decisive, and she felt it to be such. She decided at once it was not a lady's knock, and she waited with some curiosity to see who it would prove. As there were people already there, marring what might otherwise have been a delightful social evening, she had no objection to have the number increased.

After a pretty long interval for the transaction of such business, the servant brought in a card and gave it to Mr. Fawcett, who read it with a start of surprise, made an inquiry of her that escaped Catherine's ear, and then, apolo-

gising to his companion, left the room. A period of fully ten minutes elapsed, during which Catherine sat with her eyes fixed on the door, waiting for its opening.

She guessed it all—she expected to see Mr. Erskine. She was not mistaken. At length the door opened, and Mr. Fawcett and a stranger appeared. It was growing dusk—too much so for a minute analysis of his person at any distance ; she could just see the prominent distinguishing points. The figure was very tall, and aggressively erect ; his gait, as he crossed the room to be introduced to Mrs. Hamilton, indicating an indifference, partly springing from an extreme haughtiness, partly assumed to hide the shyness of a natural reserve. A mass of thick, dark hair covered his forehead, and threw a heavy shade over the face—an effect, however, that was immediately dissipated the moment the eyes were raised. So large as almost to exceed the limits of beauty, with a depth of colour which made it difficult to

decide upon their precise shade, their intense lustre and keen intellect made the whole countenance look alight.

Mrs. Hamilton received him warmly, she was always delighted to have an opportunity of showing kindness to her nephew's friends, while Frances rose from her piano to speak to him. Mr. Fawcett too, was necessitated to present him to the rest of the party, to which Mr. Erskine submitted with ill-disguised impatience, answering the polite bows and salutations by a very stiff inclination of the head, and a movement of the lips, from which no sound issued. When it came to Catherine's turn, he seemed fairly wearied, but meeting the steady gaze with which she was examining his face, he turned his eyes full upon her, with an expression of displeased annoyance, and established the balance in his own favour, by bestowing upon her a few moments' searching scrutiny. Catherine's colour rose as

she heard him say, to Mr. Fawcett, in a very audible tone, as he took a chair in her immediate neighbourhood.

“Who did you say she was?”

She lost the answer, but he appeared soon satisfied, for the next she heard was a reply to his friend’s inquiry of, “how long he had been in town?”

“A month,” he said.

“I wonder you have not called before.”

“I wish I had not called now; can’t you stop that young man’s playing?”

“Scarcely, but I can promise you some better presently.”

“If you will put an end to that it is all I ask. I can’t stay in the room to hear it, it sets my teeth on edge. If you won’t, I shall be obliged to do it.”

He cast such a fierce glance towards the unconscious performer, that Catherine was quite prepared to see him follow it up by

action. However, presently the piano ceased, and she heartily responded to Mr. Erskine's fervent, "Thank God!"

Mr. Fawcett then asked Frances to give them a particular piece, during the admirable execution of which his irritated friend relapsed into quiescence that was fast quickening into absolute enjoyment, when his attention was called off to another quarter. The portly gentleman before mentioned, whose political disquisition had been interrupted by his arrival, now once more drew up his chair beside Mr. Fawcett's and perseveringly renewed the conversation. He was not content with that gentleman's polite notice alone, his views he deemed worthy of a wider dissemination, and he claimed Mr. Erskine's ear. Catherine watched him with sympathetic interest, she saw how he writhed under the emphatic shallowness and self-complacent prosiness of the speaker. However, it was only an acute eye which would have discovered this fact, and

that of Mr. Rogers was not acute ; being listened to without interruption, he doubted not it was the silence of approval and admiration, and generously willing to give others a chance as well as himself, he said, with an air of smiling patronage—

“ Now, sir, I should like to hear your views on this subject, as well as the general opinion of the Edinburgh people.”

“ I never talk politics,” was the abrupt answer ; and Erskine changed his seat for an isolated chair, standing near the fire-place.

Mr. Fawcett meeting Mr. Rogers’ stare of amazement made some apology, which, for his sake, was graciously received.

“ It is not of the least consequence, don’t mention it,” he said ; “ I see how it is, the poor young man is quite ignorant of the usages of society.”

And he resumed the thread of his discourse.

At length lights were brought up, and this occasioned a little diversion. As one of the

ladies remarked, "they were now able to see one another," and in truth, some of the party availed themselves of their privilege. Catherine turned a glance of clearer inspection upon Mr. Erskine, who had waited for the lighting of the lamp, to examine an engraving which hung on the wall, and, favourably, for the end she had in view, was absorbed in testing its merits. He had tossed back, with a movement so effective as to raise a doubt of its being purely natural, the thick loose curls that overhung his brow, and thus the face, slightly raised, was in her full view. It was that of a man of twenty-five, but it looked older. It had lost already the roundness and freshness of youth and health, and in its very expression there was a maturity of thought and experience. The brow, with its white and prominent temples in repose, was beautiful, at all times it was intellectual, but there was an habitual contraction that seemed to testify to some inward disquiet, and deprived the observer of the

pleasure which otherwise a countenance of rare classical perfection was calculated to produce.

Moreover, the restless fire of the eyes, and the nervous lines about the mouth contributed to increase the painful effect. He looked as if he were labouring under some suppressed irritation that found an outlet in the working of his features—as if vitality had with him too full an action, making life too quick within his system. At the same time the natural result of this state of feeling, which would have made gesture and speech abrupt and eager, was almost nullified by the meeting of an invincible reserve which shrank from all self-disclosure, even in its almost inevitable manifestations, with a bitter pride which was equally based on his own estimate of himself, which he held almost alone, and a consequent contempt for the opinion of others. One conclusion Catherine Irving reached as she analysed, feature by feature, the face before her : that if

he had set out in life with the intent to master feeling, he would have a hard task before him. Others beside herself, had turned their eyes upon the stranger, among the rest, young Howard Rogers. As there was a vacant chair near Mr. Erskine, and as the young man, (who especially piqued himself upon the perfect ease of his manners and address,) observed that no one seemed to be taking any particular notice of him, he resolved "to do the amiable" himself, and make a new claim upon the admiration of the young ladies. So he sauntered gracefully across the room, dropped into the proposed seat, and indicating, with a slight inclination of the head, the engraving at which Erskine had been looking, opened the conversation with the enquiry, made with an air of easy familiarity—

"Fond of pictures, sir?"

At his approach and address, the contemptuous artist palpably recoiled, and Catherine,

in the excess of her fellow-feeling, saved him the trouble of silencing his presumptuous interlocutor, by saying—

“You are quite out of your element, Mr. Howard, you had better even come to the piano again.”

Mrs. Rogers bridled, and her son's face took the deep dye, not of shame, but of rage; the attack seemed so inexplicable to most of the party, that they stared at each other, and at the speaker, and at her victim for enlightenment. It was an awkward moment, but Mrs. Hamilton was prompt to heal the breach.

“Oh! Mr. Howard,” she said, “you mustn't mind what Miss Irving says; she treats us all alike, we all get our turn. Young ladies, now-a-days, are so sarcastic.”

The young man was obliged to be content with this apology, while Erskine received this intervention in his behalf, with the faintest possible smile, as if it were beneath him to

be amused at the obvious humiliation of the other, and rewarded Catherine by as prolonged and steady an examination as if she had been an inanimate study.

At length the two matrons began to talk about departure, a promise, however, which they took some time to fulfil. But the mere mention of it revived Catherine's spirits, and sustained her till she had the pleasure of seeing it put in final execution.

"Now, Mr. Erskine, pray don't think of going," urged Mrs. Hamilton, as on her return to the parlour, from having seen the last of her guests, she found him in contemplation of the dial of his watch. "Perhaps we shall be able to persuade this naughty girl now to give us a song. For shame, Catherine, if young Rogers lives a thousand years, he would never forgive you."

"And if I were to live a thousand too, I should never care to make him."

"Mr. Erskine did not seem very sensible to the kindness of your interposition, Catherine," said Frances.

"Kindness," repeated he, "I took it simply for what it was, the young lady seized her opportunity for letting forth her personal contempt. I owe her nothing for having furnished the occasion."

"You are mistaken," said Catherine; "I had no personal grudge against the young man; all I thought of was how intolerable his manner and question would be to you. I felt as you would feel, and spoke accordingly."

Mr. Erskine looked at her as if to discover how far he was to believe this protestation of disinterestedness, and then, being convinced, said—

"Before you are much older, you will find it a very thankless thing to espouse other people's quarrels."

"When I espouse them," returned Catherine,

“they are not other people’s, for I make them my own.”

He smiled ; but Catherine did not like the smile, for it seemed as if he pitied her assertion as a weakness, and she added, warmly—

“I pity those who make it a principle to feel for nothing but their own interests, and who never go out of their way to sympathise with others.”

“No doubt, but the declaration seems rather gratuitous. I don’t suppose any of us confess to an admiration of absolute selfishness.”

Catherine felt vexed, it did seem as though she had been fighting the air, and the indifference with which Erskine turned to ask a question about the trains vexed her more. It seemed to her as though he ought to have known the genuine interest she took in him as an artist, and paid her more regard.

“You have still more than half-an-hour,” Mr. Fawcett had said, “come, Catherine, let us have one song.”

Catherine sang more than one ; encouraged thereto by the profound attention with which Mr. Erskine listened. She had seen before that he was able to appreciate music ; therefore, conscious of her own power, she had no doubt that hers would influence him.

On rising, at length, from the piano, and turning round, she saw that he had risen from his seat and was leaning over the mantel-piece ; there was a change too in the expression of his face, he looked as if he had been moved, and gravity and sadness had succeeded to the emotion. As Catherine came nearer he looked up at her with a smile, and extending his hand—

“Come !” he said, “we are both artists, let us shake hands upon it. I don’t say I congratulate you ; after all, genius is a very questionable birthright.”

“Don’t say that !” exclaimed she, clasping with enthusiasm the extended hand ; “give me

the pains of genius, and others may take the pleasures of mediocrity."

"Poor girl! I like your ardour," said Erskine, smiling; "the ardour of a novice who does not know what she is talking about, and fancies the practice will be as easy to bear as the theory is to receive. Wait a little, till you have had your just claim cried down, and your rights trampled under foot, in the every-day scuffle of life, and then you won't be so rapturous about your privilege."

"My idea is that just claims must be met," said Catherine, with some hesitation; "I mean genius must make its way at last."

"At last! no doubt of it; the crown is always hung—but the pity is it is generally above the grave. Now, if you have any notion that you have a spark of genius, and have some idea of asserting the notion one way or another, ask yourself, at starting, a few plain questions. Is your faith in yourself strong enough to believe steadily in what all

the world may deny? Will you be able to persevere, without encouragement, to labour without sympathy? Are you firm enough to fix a point and never swerve from it in spite of gibes and sneers, and the entreaties of short-sighted friendship? But of course you are not; no woman yet ever was."

"But I am! I will be!" cried Catherine, eagerly. "I am able to follow up an object, and sure of myself. I am confident I could bear up against everything."

Erskine shook his head.

"Not you," he said; "there is a difficulty you can't overcome, no woman yet ever toiled very high up to the steep of fame. They are all drawn aside because they see their humbler sisters lapped in love, happy wives and happy mothers, and when the chance is offered them they have not the courage to throw it from them. They give up their chance of immortality, and sit down on the pleasant stepping stones of time. You will be like the rest,

perhaps weaker than many. I don't know what your intellect may be, but I have seen something of your heart, and have a fair guess which is the stronger."

Catherine was silent; after a moment's pause she raised her eyes and said, with a flushed cheek—

"Well, Mr. Erskine, after all, happiness is my final aim; I fancy I can only get at it at the top of the steep, but if I should find it on the stepping-stones, shouldn't I be more mad than wise to throw my chance away?"

"Of course," said he, with an almost contemptuous smile; "but don't fancy to be happy is the same as being great."

"I want to unite the two."

"Impossible; happiness implies comfort, satisfaction at least, and the pursuit of greatness is a hard, rough, painful warfare. You will find out your mistake—you must take your choice, and your choice is already made."

"I consider, Erskine, your theory is not

sound," said Mr. Fawcett; "you seem to think happiness and ease synonymous. Now, I will grant there can be little ease for a man in a hot pursuit of fame, and that, from extrinsic causes, the chances of happiness are against him; but I can't consider he is necessarily debarred from the latter. That depends upon the spirit and the means in and with which he follows up his object. And I like no better your notion that the less heart a man has the better his chance of success."

"Don't interpret my notions," returned Erskine, indignantly, "unless you can understand them. I have no such notion; it is absolutely impossible for a man to be great—absolutely great—without a heart. My doctrine is this, however strong the heart, intellect and will must be stronger still, in order to be able to control and force and conquer it whenever its passions or impulses would be inimical to his ultimate object. I don't care about any

one's adopting my theory, it is enough for me that men prove it whether they will or no, and that I act upon it."

Mr. Fawcett looked at the speaker with a sentiment of mingled admiration and compassion. In that fine, flexible face there was no lack of sensibility; in order to exalt and satisfy the one-half of his nature he was resolved on the crucifixion of the other. It was surely a hard warfare.

"How much," was the reflection of the Christian, "will men suffer and do for this world's glory, while but one half of that endeavour would secure the favour of God and the eternal kingdom."

"Fawcett," said Erskine, meeting the look, "I read your heart to the bottom; but it is too near the fag end of the half-hour to enter upon any new theme. Moreover, neither argument nor temptation will seduce me from the path I have chosen. I will offer up everything a sacrifice to my art."

"Perhaps the strong test has not yet been applied?"

"Very likely there may be harder struggles before me; neither my age nor natural temperament make me invulnerable. But let them come! For once you will see a man consistent with his theory."

He raised his head, as he said this, with an air of haughty self-confidence, the large eyes dilating with an expression as if the anticipated temptation were already met and conquered. Catherine's face reflected the emotion. She followed every word with an unhalting sympathy.

Erskine's eyes fell presently upon her.

"As for you," he said, addressing her, "don't try and emulate my example, or rather my doctrines, for what do people know of me? Do as you say, be wise and not mad, happy and not great."

"I will be great," said Catherine, emphatically.

What else could she have said or thought under his immediate influence?

"We shall see; I suppose, if you should be, I shall hear of it? Good night."

His leave-takings were stiff and cold, he seemed to withdraw again within himself now that the excitement of the discussion was over, and showed but small gratitude for Mrs. Hamilton's kindly expressed hope that they should often see him.

"He did not think it likely, Mr. Fawcett had more leisure than he, and it was more reasonable to expect to see him in Newman Street than himself at Sydenham."

After his departure, a brief silence reigned. It was not owing to the restraint of Mr. Fawcett's presence, for he had accompanied his friend to the train. Frances was the first to break it, by asking—

"Well, mamma, what do you think of Mr. Erskine?"

"Why, to confess the truth, I am not sorry

that he says we shall see very little of him. He is far too eccentric for my taste, but that is the privilege of men of genius."

"And what do you think?" Frances repeated, addressing Catherine, who was walking up and down the room.

"That if I were a man, I would be just such a one."

"And I think," said Frances, volunteering her opinion, "that I should uncommonly like to win him to sit down with me upon one of the stepping-stones. Talk about conquests! that would be one worth gaining."

Catherine stopped in her walk.

"Not so, Frances; what I should like would be to be helped by him over the stepping-stones up to the steep of fame."

"My dear girls," said Mrs. Hamilton, "depend upon it, either would be a dangerous experiment. He would resist you both. If you want to be happy, and I was quite glad to hear

so reasonable a sentiment from Catherine just now, don't take men like Erskine for your husbands. And now I advise you both to go to bed."

They followed this advice in the letter, though not in the spirit, for they laid awake talking for hours. Do my uninitiated readers wonder of what? A subject had been touched upon that evening, not often discussed between them—that of the heart and the affections. What they talked of therefore were the chances, and probabilities, and degrees of happiness to be expected from this source, whether indeed therein was enclosed the chief earthly good, and what were their precise individual requirements, anticipations, and desires.

When to this fertile theme was added a discussion and re-discussion of Erskine's peculiar views, and his character, so far as it had unfolded itself that evening, and a feminine analysis of his appearance, no one will longer

be surprised that two intelligent and ardent girls found matter for eager, not to say eloquent talk for more hours than one.

The following day Catherine returned to the city.

There was a fortnight before her to spend under her aunt's roof, and she had prepared herself for a fortnight of endurance. However matters proved more tolerable than she had anticipated. Miss Irving seemed almost satisfied with having separated her from her friends, and in exacting certain services, and prescribing certain employments to which her niece thought fit to submit. It was not that Catherine's temper was humbler, but during the last six months her very pride had been educated: it was more in accordance with her higher sense of her own dignity to yield, in matters in which no real interest was involved, than to descend to a hand-and-hand struggle for the victory of the will. Besides occupations which left her mind free, were not so

irksome as they had been. Her sphere of thought was wider, her interests were less limited, her plans more matured. In a great measure too the bitterness of her former position was gone, the firmest link in the chain of her aunt's iron authority had been snapped, she had won her independence. Whatever Mr. Fawcett's claim might be upon her, it had enabled her to get free from a bondage that had eaten into her soul, it had opened her out a path in life; one, two more years and she would be treading it! She comforted herself with these reflections, they made Miss Irving's bitter severity endurable. As for her uncle, at their first meeting, he had asked her "how she was getting on at school?" and then he had fallen back into his usual habit of unconsciousness of her presence, seeming to ignore the fact of her long absence. Her aunt, beyond an occasional sarcasm and a taunting reference to Mr. Fawcett, never condescended to recognise her having been to school; but

Catherine could easily dispense with her recognition. The fruit of the last half-year was safely gathered.

This dreary and self-centred fortnight led to another result. Leaving her such leisure for thought, it deepened the impression Mr. Erskine had made upon her mind. She considered and re-considered his sentiments, recalled all the scanty information she had received on the subject, recurred to every indication of character, every expression and gesture, to the tone of his voice, to feature and attitude, in short, to everything which that brief interview had offered to her notice. The ideal which fact made imperfect, imagination filled up. Strongly possessed in his favour, she almost unconsciously ascribed to him every quality worthy of a man, according to her impression of the sex, and, what was more, every gift and attribute capable of making up her ideal of the artist. She had a fair ground-work to build upon. To her peculiar turn of mind

there could scarcely have been presented a character more likely to captivate it than Erskine's. The very points which some might have objected to pleased her. She had a quick sympathy with his pride, his abrupt reserve, his absolute rudeness even. His very carelessness of others piqued her interest, his seeming lack of amiability was a bond of union. Moreover, the crowning excellence—there hung the aroma of genius about him. It signified little that she knew nothing of his works, she felt they must be great; she had heard him speak, seen how thought and feeling could rouse him to passion and eloquence, and she had not a doubt on that point. It seemed to her as though he had crossed her path, that she might see her own favourite theory, her own most honoured aspiration worked out and accomplished. A great artist! that point gained, there was the summit of human ambition! It was only because her ideal sat so high, and to reach it required such strength of wing and

undazzled eye, that she had not primed her powers for the flight. But what was too high for her she might see another reach, she could watch the upward progress and was quite capable of exulting when the crown was seized. Indeed, as she had abandoned the pursuit as hopeless for herself, she rejoiced to see the aim appropriated by a worthier combatant. She already began to identify herself with this matter. She determined to let no opportunity slip of seeing Mr. Erskine's works, of enquiring into and understanding his peculiar views and plans, of tracing his reputation from its rising point up to the highest, and if it should ever be in her power, to help the world to do justice to his genius. Burning with an inborn enthusiasm for art, she had pictured to herself already, scores of times, as she paced up and down her bed-room floor after her instinctive fashion, the career of an artist, and now as her imagination took up the theme, again she congratulated herself that it might be her privi-

lege to follow it. Safe would such ardent reveries have been, had it been in fact only the career of an artist she had contemplated, but the idea, long vague, had become definite, the artist had risen before her. Her fancy had now a centre, her notions had become individualised. On the threshold of womanhood, with her feelings more mature than her years, a tangible object had been presented to her, which drew to itself an imagination long vagrant and roaming amidst shadows, and fixed on one point an interest, the full strength of which had never been previously exercised, and to which a supposed identity of feeling added impetus and intensity. At length the fortnight expired, and Catherine exchanged these solitary musings for the active and engrossing duties of school.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE first acquaintance with Death, forms an era in the life of every human being. Before, we have known that it was stern and awful, then we feel it to be so in every shrinking nerve, in every startled perception. Perhaps we had fancied we were able to realise it; then, for the first time, we comprehend that Death is incomprehensible. Have we before had what we deemed solemn and befitting thoughts concerning this inevitable change — they seem to us then a frivolous mockery of the supreme importance of the subject.

Never has any man grasped the primary truth of the vanity of life until he has stood by the side of some breathless body which he once

knew vital and active as himself. He sees in that livid, soul-bereft clay, a pre-monition of the doom awaiting him ; then the conviction strikes keen to the heart that life is but a vapour, for he has seen it pass away from between those stony lips ; that the glory and beauty of man is indeed like the grass that withereth, for he has seen it cut down ; that a God exists—for the spirit has returned to Him that gave it, and the result lies before him. Has he never prayed before ? A crushing sense of his impotence, a near view of the awful mystery of a future state—a living sense of past error—a horrible shrinking from entering upon that which is now experience to him who was once his friend, forces the unaccustomed cry from his lips. Then is the moment when the sick imagination, constrained to feed on what it loathes, looks from the death bed to the straitened coffin, and thence to the corruption of the grave ; then it is that man is conscious of his nothingness, feels the almighty

power that dissolves him into dust, and nought seems worth caring for but that forgotten soul which is, and will never cease to be, and of the corruptible alone is incorruptible. Eternity, which yesterday was but a phrase, seems now a felt reality; Death has become a visible presence. It may be that he will go out into the world again and do just as he had done before. He will buy and sell, eat and drink, laugh and talk as hitherto. He will still live in the present, still put away the future, still stifle the sense of the soul that was quickening within him, still ignore the claims of the living God. But I defy him ever to put quite away that awful impression. When he lies down in his bed he will think, in spite of himself, of that churchyard standing not far off, and that grave where the dead is lying. He will recal with a sigh the last pressure of the living hand, and the question will be forced upon him, how looks that same hand now? He tries to forget, but

he cannot, the last aspect, when the heavy coffin lid was raised, and wonders if he could now recognise the face he once knew so familiarly, while striving to put the conjecture from him. "Dead!" the word will haunt him with a power it never had before; there is nothing for it but to put forth all his strength of will, and forget that his own days are numbered. A man cannot exist with the prospect of death before his eyes. Truly no. The Christian—even the noblest development of manhood—could not support it. If he does not shrink from death, it is because he views it as a conquered enemy, by whose only means it is he is conducted to a higher life.

Catherine Irving had been brought face to face with death. More than two years have passed since we last spoke of her, the last three months of which had been spent in attendance on her aunt's sick bed. They had proved months of sharper endurance than any she had yet known; viewed by their light, her past ex-

perience seemed easy. Sarah's enmity seemed to gather force in proportion as the power of exercising it declined. She felt that Catherine's generosity induced a submission to her in her sickness she had never yielded in health, and her requirements were consequently relentless. They would have wearied tenderness the most entire, and exhausted patience the most complete. But pride and a refined self-love endured, where tenderness and patience would have failed. Whatever might be both the physical and mental effects of Miss Irving's malice, Catherine stoically and disdainfully concealed their traces from the eye which would have detected them with pleasure. Alone, she allowed a vent for her outraged feelings, giving no check to the complex passion of her heart, but before her aunt, a resolution which never faltered sustained her in her purpose. In the firm compression of the delicate lips, in the defiant light of the lustrous eyes, in the erect bearing and decisive tread,

one might read the spirit of the ancient hero who could endure all hardness and despite, but from whose lips nothing would force the admission of suffering. Sarah saw it, and was baffled. She felt that the spirit of the girl was stronger than her own, and was conqueror over her hate. She felt too that her hour was rapidly passing, that she was going out of life, leaving the path free to that dauntless, ambitious heart. She felt she had failed—Basil's child had circumvented her. Could the father see his daughter, would he wish her other than she was? Beautiful, accomplished, gifted, and aspiring, what harm had her old enmity done? There were friends to take her hand when she was dead—there was a means of independent subsistence already secured.

“Oh! I have lived in vain!” thought the unhappy woman, as she closed her eyes to shut out the sight of her niece; “robbed of my own rights, and unable to revenge the wrong!”

Death did not soften her; she had a hard conviction that there was justice in her wish for vengeance, and that the Supreme Judge would deal gently with one who, in this world, had been so grossly wronged, and had so keenly suffered.

We need not detail that death scene. Catherine, and the old surgeon, who had known Sarah from a child, and Richard, who wept bitterly with his sister's hand in his, were the only ones present.

There was no acknowledgment of injury, no prayer for forgiveness, no form of reconciliation.

The clergyman, for whom Richard had sent, came too late; hard, saturnine, and repellent, Sarah Irving had died as she had lived; for the first time, there was a cessation to her hate when the iron fingers of death had pressed out all emotions from the lifeless heart.

On the evening of her death, after the de-

parture of the surgeon and a confidential friend, who had come in to assist in discharging the last duties to the dead, Catherine, having persuaded Richard, who felt an aching deficiency of something which was necessary to his comfort, to go to bed, took up a candle, and bent her steps alone to the chamber where the body was lying. The door had been locked, and the room was empty, for there was no one amidst the small household willing to perform that painful act of supererogation, to watch the dead. She turned the key again in the lock as she closed the door, put down her light, and approached the corpse. A handkerchief covered the face, but beneath the smooth sheet it was easy to define the gaunt outline of the lifeless figure. She stood for a few moments with folded arms and eyes cast down upon it, but without attempting to uncover the face. She had seen it as it had settled in death, and something withheld her from renewing the gaze. She felt that death

ought to be sacred from everything but the agonised scrutiny of affection. She well knew such would not be hers. Even now, as she stood in fixed contemplation, there was no softening in her expression. The experiences of a life-time were hardening her heart. All that the lifeless body suggested was that now the voice was silent which had terrified her childhood, and embittered her youth—the eyes closed, whose stern glance had sometimes frozen, sometimes maddened her—the hand passive which had been a perpetual goad. She who had hated her was dead.

“And I forgive her!” thought Catherine, arousing herself from the hard bitterness which such reminiscences caused; “it shall never be that I take mean advantage of my state, and hate one who can hate no more. Yes, I will throw the past behind me, and go boldly out to meet the future.”

But there was a weight in that death-cham-

ber she could not throw off, she turned away from the bed, and began softly to pace the room.

It was a dreary autumnal evening within, the candle she had brought shed a ghastly light over the uncurtained bed, where lay the corpse, and sleet and rain fell audibly against the window. She felt to the quick the influences of the scene, but she would not succumb, it was a discipline for her endurance. As she paced to and fro, she thought over the circumstances of Sarah Irving's life so far as she knew them. How loveless, joyless, and meagre it had been! Having consented to forgive the past, it was an easy step to pity.

Catherine fell into a melancholy train of conjecture: things might have been, perhaps, different! Had there been no soft place in the woman's heart, which she might have touched and conquered her? A feeling of self-reproach arose. Who has ever stood by their dead

without it? Then she was led on to look forward into her own life, it promised to form a contrast with that just extinct, but it must end the same! There came back to her mind a conversation she had had years back in the adjoining room with Arnold Fawcett, and many a one of the same kind since. He was right; many things are desirable; but there is but one thing "needful," and Catherine felt it. "Oh! to be able to look beyond the gloomy valley up to a heaven opened, and a God reconciled!" There was a struggle in her heart, a passionate desire to be preserved from such a death as she had witnessed, to get religion, vital and all sustaining, *in the end*, and a dread of insulting the Deity by a prayer with such a reservation in her mind.

"And yet He knows all," she reflected, "all the frailty and inveterate worldliness of my heart. There is nothing for me to do but to pray that His will may constrain mine—His power force me to a surrender."

She shrank, however, from the prospect of the conflict which this idea involved, and made an effort to put the subject from her. She was near the window, and raising the blind she looked down on the vast thoroughfare beneath. The gas-lamps burnt dimly in the damp air, but the tide of human life was little arrested by the weather. The pavements still teemed with a thronging crowd—more eager of progress, more reckless of civility, more doggedly bent each on gaining his own point, and keeping his own path, than usual. It had rained all day, and the water dripped heavily from the overhanging eaves of the houses upon the passers-by, and their thoroughly-soaked unfurled-umbrellas—some even lacked this poor screen—and impelled by some strong necessity hurried on, keeping close within the doubtful shelter of the houses, with their thread-bare garments drenched, and their weary feet plashing recklessly the mud around them. Vehicles of all kinds plied in increasing

number, and with accelerated velocity, the ample, but crowded street, raising the ordinary tumult to a louder and more distracting din. Still early, the shops and warehouses were closed, there was little chance of business on such a night.

How often, from her own bed-room window, had Catherine looked on a similar scene? Sometimes with feelings of moody wretchedness—sometimes with passionate discontent. The last few years had been more happy and successful than at one time she had ever dared to expect. She was no longer straitened by ignorance—she no longer looked round on a world where she had no friends.

I have passed over two years of her life because there would be little interest in tracing minutely her progress at school. She had laboured as hard as she had said, and she had achieved as much as she had expected.

Mr. Fawcett, during the brief periods which

Miss Irving permitted her to spend at Sydenham, had been induced to act the part of tutor, and it was easy to his pupil to follow a road once pointed out. Catherine had accepted eagerly his offer; the modern education of even an accomplished woman did not satisfy her, she was capable of more. Her mind, surging with fresh activity, was perpetually demanding work for its powers. I will not enumerate her acquirements, nor startle my readers by showing how her genius spurned the bounds which some would prescribe to the feminine intellect. Mental quiescence seemed impossible to her, her brain was always at work; for imagination and original thought filled up the intervals of study.

She had already left school before her aunt's final illness; during her attendance upon her, not a week had passed without a visit, or act of personal kindness from the Hamiltons and Mr. Fawcett. The period which had elapsed, quiet and uneventful as it had been, had served to

cement the friendship of each to each. It was a point arranged that after Miss Irving's funeral, Catherine should return to Sydenham as her future home. She, herself, made no objection, it was her intention to obtain a situation at her earliest opportunity; and it was scarcely to be feared that opportunities would be lacking to one so qualified as herself. The interval before this was accomplished she looked eagerly forward to spending with her friends and benefactor.

Oh! at this moment as she stood reviewing the past, and revolving the future, with what fervent gratitude she acknowledged the benefaction which had made that future a prospect of independence and hope!

Sarah Irving was interred in the family vault in the city church-yard, enclosing the fine old church, but lost by its situation, where her father had preached in years long past, and where both parents and her brother Basil lay before her. Her annuity dying

with her, and having saved nothing, her will, of which her brother was executor, was little more than a form. It served however to mark by this last act her feeling towards her niece, for every item of her property was pointedly alienated from her and bequeathed elsewhere. The loss indeed was inconsiderable, but the fact deepened that cankering sense of wrong from which Catherine desired to free herself. Richard felt Sarah's loss deeply, not that there had ever been much love between them, but he had been accustomed to her for nearly fifty years and it seemed strange to live without her. However he forgot the painful novelty over his books, it was only when the hours came round when they had been accustomed to meet at meals, or at night when going to rest that it pressed upon him that Sarah was dead. Connected with it would come the thought that some day he too must die, and the hope rose instinctively that the summons might not come till

his great work, his stupendous "Critical Dictionary of Synonymes" was finished. One thing comforted him, he was not called upon to change his abode. An elderly lady and gentleman, friends of the deceased, were to rent part of the house at a moderate sum, and undertook to superintend the domestic comforts of the lone student.

On the morning that Catherine was to take her final leave for Sydenham she went to pay her farewell visit to her uncle. At the moment she entered, Richard was neither writing nor reading, he was revolving an abstruse point with his elbow on his piles of manuscript, and his head on his hand. The attitude had the effect of melancholy, it touched Catherine.

"Pray, uncle, do you ever feel lonely?" she asked, laying her hand on his arm and speaking in a certain caressing tone she assumed on rare occasions.

Lonely! the word startled Richard, he was

not accustomed to think upon the subject or in any way to analyse his own feelings, but it seemed suddenly to strike him that there had been moments, though the present was not one, when he had thus felt. He looked up at Catherine. Her beauty, her attitude as she bent over him made another and a finer chord vibrate; it recalled to him an early day-dream when books had not been his chief idol, and the scholar had been forgotten in the lover. But how long ago it was! how long ago since he was young—had felt that brief tumult of passion! How strong but how evanescent it had been! how he had despised himself for being won, even for an interval, from his books by a loveliness which had duped and trifled with so many hearts! He put away the passing sentiment which Catherine's words had stirred as akin to the same weakness.

"No, my dear," he said, "I miss poor Sarah, but I never feel lonely."

"It would be in vain to ask if you will

miss me or regret my going away, at all?" pursued she smiling, but somewhat sadly.

"Why, my dear, we have had so little to do together, too little, perhaps, that it will not make much difference. But I wish you well, Catherine, Mr. Fawcett speaks very kindly of you, I shall be very glad to hear of your being comfortably settled."

Catherine felt chilled, her uncle was beginning to turn nervously the leaves of a book, so she restrained the affectionate sympathy it would have needed only a tone to call forth, and cut short the interview. How grateful in contrast was the warm welcome she received on her arrival at Sydenham. As they all gathered round the fire after dinner, it almost seemed to Catherine, so slight was the external change, as if she could fancy it that first ever-to-be remembered day when she was brought among them. Two years and a half had made no very perceptible difference in Mrs. Hamilton or her nephew, its results were more evident

in herself and Frances. Each touching upon her nineteenth year, the promise of their earlier girlhood had been more than redeemed, for the beauty of both was remarkable in its distinct development. A maturer intellect had softened the wild, restless eagerness of Catherine's former expression, but at the same time, if there was more calmness in it, it could not have been pronounced absolutely calm. The face was still as prompt to reflect the workings of the soul, the eyes still flashed on occasion with sinetillations as brilliant as of old, and the flexible mouth indicated the same temperament as then, only that depth and intensity held its former unrestrained ardour in check.

Frances's light musical laugh and sweet animated smile were as frequent as ever ; but an acute observer might have detected beneath her gaiety an increasing sensibility which made itself felt occasionally in the ringing vibration of her tones, and the expression of

her fine grey eyes. On the evening in question, owing to their having discussed Miss Irving's death, and Catherine's future prospects, she was in an unusually subdued mood.

"Catherine," she said, breaking a short silence, "used always to be asking me at school what I meant to do. I begin to think I ought to do something, I ought to have some business in life. I have no more right to be idle than she. Suppose I go out for a governess too?"

Mrs. Hamilton looked nervously at her nephew.

"My dear Frances!" said he, in the tone of one startled by a strange and unpleasant idea.

Upon this the mother spoke.

"What do you think we could do without you, Frances? You have a very important business to do, to make me and Arnold happy. Put away such crochets, we don't mean to let you go until, perhaps, somebody comes and

takes you away by force—force of pertinacious love, I mean.”

“Frances seemed in a depressed mood. With her eyes fixed on the fire, she said, decisively,

“That will never be.”

Mrs. Hamilton laughed, and Mr. Fawcett looked up with a smile.

“Is the sex unworthy?” he asked.

Frances blushed, but was not silenced.

“I don’t presume to pronounce absolutely ; but I am sure I shall never meet any one that will suit me.”

“Young ladies in the present day,” said Mr. Fawcett, “are become absolute philosophers. They make theories about the affections, and analyse and dissect their individual hearts till they are weakened for their natural, proper exercise. I am not sure that the old vulgar notions about a woman’s sphere were not right after all ; one thing is certain, learning German and getting a good knowledge of French have their drawbacks.”

"You are quite right there, Arnold," cried Mrs. Hamilton, with an arch look at her daughter, "mothers, for instance, can't tell now-a-days what sort of books their girls get hold of. I came in suddenly yesterday morning and found Frances crying bitterly over a book she was reading. I thought she looked a little ashamed, so I asked her what she had got there.

" 'Only a German story,' she said, 'I have read it often before.'

"I took it up and looked at the title-page; but of course I could make nothing out, girls are certainly amazingly clever now-a-days! I asked the culprit what it was that she found so affecting at the oft-renewed perusal?"

" 'Oh! it was a well-known story by one of their best writers.' And so forth, but I didn't get at the name."

"Well, never mind the book now," said

Frances, laughing and colouring, "it was nothing very objectionable. I dare say both you and Arnold have read it, for it has had an English dress and a French one too; the worst is, people misunderstand it, and they always abuse what they misunderstand."

Mr. Fawcett smiled.

"I have a shrewd guess, Frances; and I shall begin to look after you. Those sort of works are not nourishing food. They make life seem flat and insipid, and indispose to vigorous action; they make the head weary and the whole heart faint. I dare say Catherine entertains the same views as yourself, she despairs of finding any heart to satisfy hers."

"I may despair of fixing such a heart upon myself," was her answer; "but I don't doubt that such there are."

Mr. Fawcett seemed to reflect over this reply. Frances smiled. Mrs. Hamilton said—

"I am very glad to hear you say so ; it is really encouraging. I begin to hope that your opinions are settling down a little."

Catherine smiled—there was a slight shade of irony in her smile—but she refrained from dashing Mrs. Hamilton's hope. Frances took up the conversation by saying—

"I am reminded of the night two years ago, when Mr. Erskine was here. Catherine and I have never seen him since ; and you, Arnold, scarcely ever see him. What a strange man he is !"

Catherine coloured deeply. There was a connection between her own assertion and her friend's remark that struck her mind. Mr. Fawcett observed it.

"Paul Erskine," he said, "may be a great artist, but he is not fitted for a friend. I, at least, cannot force my friendship on one who shows me by every word and act he can do without it. I do not pretend to fully understand his character."

"Does he succeed better?" asked Frances.

"I hardly know what to say—an ordinary ambition would be contented with his measure of success, but he thinks it altogether inadequate, and throws it from him with the utmost contempt. He has a deep conviction of the superiority of his genius, but the world does not feel it as he does, and ranks inferior artists above him."

"He should remember," said Catherine, "that the world has scarcely ever recognised its great men, he should not suffer its shortsighted decision to humiliate him."

"Humiliate him! that is not in its power," said Mr. Fawcett, smiling; "Erskine knows nothing about humiliation. I never knew a man more capable of leaning on his own solitary conviction, and setting at nought a dissentient world. He believes in himself, and nothing would shake his faith."

"True," exclaimed Catherine, with enthusiasm; "and that alone proves his claim."

Genius is as sure of itself as a man of his own identity, the whole universe wouldn't persuade him out of his certainty."

"As a general rule, Catherine, that might be disputed; but as regards Erskine, I am convinced he does not over-estimate himself. He is a most uncommon man; I am not quite sure that he is wise in the peculiar application of his powers, but I have not a doubt about their existence and extent."

"And how does he apply them?"

"Well, that is rather a difficult question, especially to one who is more amateur than connoisseur. I feel afraid of doing him injustice. He has some very unique theories, the result, I believe, of profound study and investigation, for he has made painting not only an art but a science, not only a profession but a religion. People are not fond of hearing their old opinions attacked; they have been taught an almost blind reverence for the masters of the Italian school, and they are outraged to

hear this young Scotchman venture to arraign their gods, to deny former conclusions, point out undetected faults, and assert that the art of painting is capable of going beyond what even they have done."

"Yes, that is startling," said Frances; "my own notion was that Raphael and Angelo stood on the apex, and to get higher was impossible. But does he mean to say that the world has been mistaken all this time?"

"Not he," said Catherine, warmly. "I understand him. Do you suppose that he who is capable of discovering imperfection amidst greatness, does not do justness to the greatness? Do you fancy Raphael and Angelo were ever so thoroughly appreciated as by one who seeing what they have done, is capable of conceiving something higher still? But, of course, as he is conscious of a kindred power, it is not for him to take the tone of subservience."

"You are certainly an excellent interpreter of Erskine's ideas, Catherine," returned Faw-

cett. "He does explain himself much in that strain; but I don't think he dares to put himself on an equality with these great names. What he says is that he refuses to be shackled by any man that went before him. He will allow, that—far as they were from perfection—they were absolutely great, the greatest that have been, though possibly not the greatest that may yet appear. But he, too, individually, is great; and he will, in spite of the world, exert his genius independently."

"And how," repeated Catherine, again, "does he exert it?"

"Well, for his theories, as respects the different schools, I must refer you to his own remarkable articles in 'Blackwood,' and the which are almost as eagerly discussed and criticised as his paintings; and the results of these theories, as exhibited in his works, you will be able to judge of yourself. As far as I am concerned, the immense power, and extraordinary originality of his paintings so over-

whelm my imagination that if I were able to criticise I should scarcely presume to do so. But to be able to criticise Erskine's works needs considerable cultivation in art."

"The fact is," said Frances, "that ninety-nine out of a hundred do not understand his paintings, and the hundredth is not quite sure. You know I saw one of his pictures last year at the Academy."

Catherine remembered well, and how dissatisfied she had been with her information thereupon.

"I know," she said, "that he is given to paint symbolically; but if the symbol has a meaning, and it is fitly shown, every one ought to be able to discover it for themselves."

"Precisely," answered Fawcett; "that is Erskine's own idea, and therefore he refuses to give us the key. But then the meaning is not very near the surface, and people will not trouble themselves to dig for it. It is often the thought of the poet meeting that of the

metaphysician, and taking form from the painter's hand, and the result is above the popular taste."

"You own it is above?" said Catherine, smiling.

"Undoubtedly. I have said more than once that Erskine is a man of genius; but I question, at the same time, whether he will ever get it universally acknowledged. It ought to be supreme, for every thing works against him. He cannot stoop to please, his pride and discourtesy offend his own profession; rivalry is aided by personal dislike, and they deny him even what they must feel he has; and he has no patrons, for the same temper invariably displeases those that curiosity or admiration draw to his studio."

"I cannot bear him," said Mrs. Hamilton; "he called here one evening a few months ago, when Arnold was out, and I did not know what to do. He sat as moody as if he had a right to be offended, and I could scarcely ex-

tract a word. To confess the truth, when he said he could wait no longer, and rose to take his leave, I had not the heart to beg him to remain. I don't pretend to be a judge of his genius, but he is, absolutely, the most disagreeable, difficult man I know."

"You are severe," said Catherine, smiling; "I wonder if he is a happy man?"

"You forget," said Mr. Fawcett, "that he divorces happiness from greatness; but if he suffers anything from the isolation of his position he is too proud to show it, or, at least, he does not make me his confidant."

Catherine made no answer; but she thought—

"To be the confidential friend of such a man I would give up all other friendships."

At the end of three weeks, Catherine became eager for action. Life passed pleasantly, but it passed monotonously at Sydenham. She wearied of the repeated walks and talks with Frances; even the evenings spent with Mr.

Fawcett, during which books and the piano formed sources of enjoyment, and almost all subjects were discussed, did not satisfy her. She felt restless, and desirous she knew not of what. Added to this, she saw no adequate reason for not entering on her duties as a governess at once, and she urged Mr. Fawcett to make enquiries amongst his friends and connections, while she herself studied daily the advertisement sheets of the "Times."

For some time Catherine was eminently unsuccessful, her acquirements were somewhat strict and peculiar, and none of the situations advertised or heard of suited her. She wished to see society in its higher circles, and she wished to go abroad. Could she have gained these two points she would not have cared for the amount of salary or the number of pupils.

At length circumstance, that unspiritual god, favoured her. Mr. Fawcett informed her one evening, as they drew their chairs round the

fire, after dinner, that he had heard of a situation he thought possibly might meet her claims.

"Still I am very dubious," he said, smiling ; "there are not many points where Catherine's notions and mine coalesce, and this may not be one of them. However you shall hear."

"Is it in London ?" asked Catherine.

"Yes ; is that an objection ? It is in an aristocratic quarter, in the neighbourhood of St. James' Park."

"No ; I wish it to be in town. I never wished to live in the country ; but I hope I am not to extract all my information by question and answer. Tell me at once all about it."

Mr. Fawcett rose from his chair, as if wearied of his position, and desirous to relieve the constraint, by walking up and down the room. But motion was not so facile to him, and he sat down again.

"We shall be very sorry to lose you, Cathe-

rine," he said, with a heightened colour, and as if he intended the sentiment to explain his late signs of restlessness.

"Why, my dear Arnold, we do not know that we are going to lose her yet," interposed Mrs. Hamilton; "the situation may not suit her at all. You speak as if we had heard all about it, and Catherine had made up her mind."

Catherine and Frances both looked at him in surprise; the latter reached a conclusion that did justice to the promptness of her imagination, while the former said—

"Perhaps Mr. Fawcett will be glad to get rid of me?"

Mr. Fawcett had certainly paid dearly for a momentary embarrassment; he had some difficulty in setting matters smooth again; however, Catherine generously interrupted his explanations, by saying what was not quite true.

"I quite understand you, Mr. Fawcett; I

had really no such fear; but now, do let us come to particulars."

"They will very soon be enumerated," said he, in full possession of his usual manner. "The lady has one son, a little boy of about ten years old. He is a sickly, deformed, and has been, I fear, a neglected child; but she is now very anxious to obtain a governess for him."

"What an attractive office!" said Frances.

"But why not send him to school?" asked Catherine, "or at least give him a tutor. A governess for a boy of that age seems strange."

"As for sending him to school, that would be cruel, considering his condition, and for the same reason his mother prefers a capable woman to teach him; she will treat him more tenderly."

"I think his mother is mistaken; he will have to come in contact with the roughness of his own sex sooner or later; the longer he is

shielded from it the more unfit he will be," said Catherine.

"If you undertake to teach him, Catherine, you will be able to prepare him for what he will have to meet. I fancy he would interest you. Erskine says he is a clever, uncommon child."

"Erskine!" repeated his auditors.

"Yes," returned Mr. Fawcett, smiling, and looking at Catherine's eager face; "it was Erskine who spoke of the situation, He is intimate with the family, at least Mrs. Allison is a woman of fashion, and patronises, or rather courts, the cleverest and most impracticable artist of the day."

It was enough; almost any further details were almost unnecessary; where there was a chance of getting an acquaintance with Erskine, whose art and whose character both stirred her enthusiasm to its depths, she certainly would go. The interest her own thoughts excited prevented her from exer-

cising her accustomed penetration. She did not notice that Mr. Fawcett pursued the subject with a cheek paler than usual, and an evident air of constraint.

"I think, Catherine, you are pretty sure of seeing society at Mrs. Allison's, as she is an accomplished woman herself, and gathers the select of the literary, musical, and artistic world around her. She wants too a companion for herself, as well as a tutor for her boy, for your duties with him will be very light, and you are pretty sure to be received by her on an equal footing. She is rich too, and offers a large salary, and is seldom in town but during the season. Will not all this suit you?"

"Yes," said Catherine, with more decision than even Mr. Fawcett had expected; "but am I sure to suit Mrs. Allison?"

"There is little doubt about that. Your accomplishments will suit her taste, and your knowledge of those things which few women know, but all boys learn, will suit her son."

"What steps have I to take, then? Has she heard of me? shall I call upon her?"

"Yes, Erskine, I believe, has spoken of you; she has already a prepossession in your favour. She is always at home from ten till one, and would like you to call as soon as you can, if you thought the situation would suit you."

"I will go to-morrow," said Catherine.
"What is the address?"

Mr. Fawcett took out his pocket-book, and gave her the address. It was written on the envelope of a letter in pencil, and the handwriting bold, large, and firm. Catherine examined it minutely.

"I had better keep it," she said, "I may forget."

"Frances looked over her.

"Is that Erskine's writing?" she exclaimed,
"what a fine hand!"

Catherine had not asked, for she felt instinctively sure it was, and Mr. Fawcett confirmed the fact.

Then followed from Frances and her mother expressions of hearty and affectionate regret at the prospect of losing her, mingled with some reproach at her readiness to leave them.

"Oh! don't think I am ungrateful or insensible!" Catherine said earnestly, "but I long to be doing something. I think I shall like this pupil of mine. And," with a heightened colour, "I was not educated to be idle."

"My dear Catherine," said Fawcett, "if I were to consult my own feelings, I should keep my friend and pupil always at hand, but that sort of life I know would not suit you, and since you are determined to go out into the world, I think the present a very favourable opening."

"And am I to sit by the fire-side all my life," asked Frances, "while Catherine is one of the select of Mrs. Allison's world, and will astonish the musical, show artists how to sketch, dazzle every one by her gift of speech, and meanwhile take up literature as a pastime,

by-the-way. I don't like the idea, I really think I shall set about doing something."

"Ambitious, at last!" exclaimed Catherine, laughing, "well, Frances, what shall it be?"

"Something great, of course, *i. e.*, if I were to take up literature, it should be nothing short of an epic poem, or a History of England; or if governessing, I should like to try it in the family of some German countess, or Italian prince, or if, last, but not least, coquetry, I would lay siege to the strong, well-governed-heart of Paul Erskine."

"I positively believe," cried Mrs. Hamilton, laughing, "that both the girls have a hankering that way! Is there any hope for them, Arnold? Is your friend a marrying man?"

"God forbid that he should marry either of them!" exclaimed Fawcett, with an energy that made Catherine colour with a sense of indignation, and Frances laugh.

"And why not, Arnold? asked the latter, "you are not a very generous friend."

Fawcett looked at Catherine, and impressed by the expression of her countenance, said—

“I think I know something of Erskine, enough to be sure that the heaviest cross any young girl could be called upon to bear, would be his love. He thinks he has his strong nature under control; I doubt it. If he once yielded his heart, he would love with a heat that would destroy his own tranquillity and hers. He would call upon her to forfeit her individuality, for he would blend it with his. He would wind up her nature, if she were capable of bearing it—and only one who was capable would he love—to keep time with the irregular and and feverish pulsation of his own. He would lay the weight of all his burdens upon her, not so much that he is selfish, but it would be an instinct of his affection. Then he would tell the story of his professional disappointments, which now burns inwardly. She would feel as he would have her feel, and be moved as he moved her. He would cast any young, ardent nature into his own mould.

He would tell her too, that, before himself, she must love his art, and he would constrain her to the worship. He would expect her to lose herself in his warfare, to be raised by the same hopes, struck backward by the same blows. If she had any idea of happiness, any notions of domestic peace, she might throw them to the winds."

"Do you think, Mr. Fawcett, you have drawn a formidable picture?" enquired Catherine, with almost a scornful smile. "It is not likely I shall ever be bidden to such a fellowship, but you have described precisely the life it would please me to lead."

"I have been unfortunate then, and, though it may strike you as ungenerous to say it, I have described Erskine falsely, if I have described him attractively. Such a life as he would call upon his wife to lead, stripped of the charm your imagination gives it, would not please even you, Catherine. I hardly think you would be willing to hold a secondary place in any heart, and to know that you gave

far more than you received. However, let us dismiss the subject, it is generally a hard matter to remove a prejudice, either for or against."

"Arnold is a little cross to-night," said Frances laying her little hand caressingly on his arm—" *triste* at the near prospect of losing Catherine, and vexed at the perversion which persists in finding repulsion attractive. But to help you to the solution, *cher ami*, don't forget to take into account the magnificent eyes and dark locks of the hero in question."

Fawcett smiled and took possession of the kindly hand.

"Oh! but neither the one nor the other would make life smooth, and that is what I desire for my children. I can't secure happiness for either of them, but I would endeavour to defend them from the contrary."

"I think," said Mrs. Hamilton, "we need not make ourselves uneasy, Mr. Erskine will not tempt either of them, depend upon it."

Catherine went to the piano. She was excited with her new prospects, and the late turn of the conversation irritated her; she resented the manner in which Erskine was spoken of, but the almost absurdity of her deep interest in and sympathy with one of whom she knew so little kept her silent. Music was a safe vent for every feeling.

The next morning she was up early and in the breakfast-room before any one else. It was a bright autumnal morning and she threw open the window which looked upon the garden. She was in a state of pleasurable excitement, her prospects pleased her. Society, change, action! she was nearing the goal she had had so long in view.

She walked up and down the room considering her probable future; her imagination had already pictured her little pupil, and during the restless night the enthusiastic girl had arranged innumerable plans in his behalf. She believed, she hoped she would

like his mother ; she eagerly anticipated the society to which she was to be introduced. To this point she constantly recurred as to the most agreeable, and as she was always honest and truthful with herself, she did not hesitate to allow that the chance of knowing Erskine was the central charm.

Presently Mr. Fawcett came in. He bade Catherine good morning, with a smile, for her face showed her state of feeling. Animation made its beauty radiant, and he thought so, whether its animation was quite pleasing to him at that moment was another question.

"Do you look so exultant, Catherine, because you are going to be rid of your old friends?" he asked, as he stood watching her as he leaned against the window-frame.

"I believe, Mr. Fawcett, that from the first moment of our intimacy up till now you have a lurking suspicion I am hard-hearted and ungrateful. However, I never fain more

sensibility than I feel ; I am sorry that I am going to leave you, that is I should like to take my friends along with me, but I am very glad that I am going to see more of life. You know I have long wanted to be at work."

Mr. Fawcett smiled. "How often do you mean to come and see us, Catherine?"

"Oh! circumstances may influence that, but how often I shall long to come and see you is a hard sum to compute. I know I shall be seized with irresistible yearnings when I am really away ; now above all I shall miss your warning voice and restraining hand ! But you will come and look after me sometimes ?"

He shook his head.

"Not unless you should have some urgent need of me, I have not the '*entrée*' of Mrs. Allison's house, and even as your private visitor I must beg to be excused. When we meet, Catherine, it must not be *there*."

He emphasised the word, and Catherine looked at him in surprise.

"Do you know, Mrs. Allison?" she asked, for her perception was quick.

"I do not," he said with a heightened colour, "nor do I desire to make her acquaintance. It will not be necessary; you yourself, and Mr Erskine's report of what you are, will be sufficient without my appearing in behalf of my friend."

Catherine asked no further question, a vague idea crossed her mind and silenced her curiosity.

She looked earnestly at her companion, there were unmistakable signs of emotion in his face.

"You would not suffer me to go," she said, presently, "to any woman whom I could not or ought not to esteem?"

"I can trust your comfort and happiness pretty safely with Mrs. Allison from what I hear of her," was the answer, "I know nothing

of her, Catherine, that ought to be an objection to your going."

There was a pause, Mr. Fawcett went to the fire, and Catherine having revolved her fanciful notion for some time felt disposed to reject it. She stood watching him attentively as he folded the newspaper he had taken from the table. He looked up and caught her eye.

"I see, Catherine, you think there is a little mystery here," he said, bending over his paper as he spoke, "and so I will explain. In early life I knew both Mrs. Allison and the gentleman she has since married and has lost. At that time I was received by both as a social equal; I have lost caste since, and they, amongst others, did not find their friendship proof against my altered fortunes. I have no wish at the present time to renew what was then severed. But for you to refuse a situation because the lady had a conventional horror of poverty, would be too hyper-refined for even your notions."

There was a calmness in this recital and a blending of circumstances that induced Catherine to let go finally her romantic conjecture. She contented herself with saying, indignantly—

“ Friends who can’t stand the test of poverty are well lost. Perhaps you sometimes think me insensible ; I wish some severe test might come to prove to you the extent of my love and admiration and gratitude. Mr. Fawcett,” approaching him, and looking at him with her earnest intense gaze—“ it seems a vain thing for a girl like me to say or hope ; but if it were ever in my power to help, or comfort, or serve you, would you not apply to me ? Would you not be sure of me ? And it would not be gratitude that would move me, but thorough ardent regard and esteem. Your character has not been lost on me, it has done me as much good as your services, I wish I could make you believe and understand all I feel for you !”

“And I wish—” began Mr. Fawcett, laying his hand, with an involuntary movement, on the beautiful head which was leaning towards him ; but here the door was thrown open, and Frances sprang in. Of course the conversation was diverted.

As Mr. Fawcett prepared to depart for town that morning, he said to Catherine—

“When I return this evening you will have seen Mrs. Allison, and everything will be arranged. You will go to-day, of course?”

Catherine assented. She could scarcely give up so favourable a prospect, because Mrs. Allison was not, what so few are, superior to the influence of the world in which she moved ; but one charm was lost. She no longer expected to derive any real pleasure from acquaintanceship with one who had given up the friendship of Mr. Fawcett. There had been some debate whether she should call alone ; but she and Mr. Fawcett had decided that she should. Frances and her mother, who had

business in town, accompanied her even to the very door of Mrs. Allison's house, and stood apart to watch the opening of its aristocratic portals and Catherine's admission.

She herself felt her heart beat and her colour rise as she entered. There was an atmosphere of wealth and luxury perceptible, to which she was unaccustomed. The very politeness of the footman who took her name and conducted her up stairs, oppressed her. Involuntarily she trod softly on the velvet carpets, and looked furtively at the indications of taste and refinement around her. She would have liked to have paused to examine the fine bronzes which met her here and there in the niches of the staircase, which she had glanced at as she crossed the hall, and which art had constrained to utility, or to have taken a longer view of the tempting vistas, which here and there half opened doors presented; but she had to rein in the impulse. She was finally shown into a little morning-room, where, left alone, she was

at liberty to pursue her observations while waiting for Mrs. Allison.

In the appearance and furniture of this apartment there were none of the characteristics of a fashionable lady's boudoir, and Catherine soon decided it could not be such. The sofa on which she had taken a seat was evidently constructed for the ease of an invalid, and its more costly fabric was covered by one of those exquisite chintzes which almost deserve to rank amongst works of art. The few chairs and a large ottoman, of truly oriental luxury, placed in the full heat of the fire, were covered by the same. There was a book lying open upon the latter, and Catherine approached and took it up. It was a beautifully illustrated edition of the "Pilgrim's Progress," and, turning to the first fly-leaf, she found the name of the probable student. "Larry," "Larry Allison," was written over and again in a boy's unformed, childish hand, and Catherine gazed at the characters with deep interest. Interspersed

amidst the oft repeated name, were certain fantastic flourishes with the pen ; but there was freedom and even design in them, a fact not lost upon their present observer.

"Poor boy !" she thought, as she replaced the book, "is he a reader already ? and is this a favourite book ?" and she pictured to herself the "sickly deformed child," lying before the hot fire, and feeding his imagination with that wonderful dream-poem. There was a little table, low enough to be within the reach of one stretched on the ottoman, and here there were some other books. Catherine looked them over—she judged now that the room she was in might be appropriated to her little pupil's use. They were all works of imagination, "The Arabian Nights," an English translation of some of Andersen's tales, and an old volume of Pope's Homer. In the two former the boy had written his own name, in the latter it was written in chalk, by the bold, fine hand which Catherine knew to be Erskine's.

Over this piece of writing she pored long. It was astonishing how much of interest and character she extracted from the simple fact that this book had been given by the artist to the boy. Perhaps he had been the friend of the neglected child, he, the impracticable, proud, discourteous man! The book, perhaps, had been given in his own home, Larry might even be allowed to visit him, there was the mark of the studio on the title-page. What would be Larry Allison's account of Paul Erskine? She looked round to see whether there were any other indications of this friendship. On the centre table a large desk was standing open, the surface strewn with sketches and drawings. Catherine ventured to turn them over. Larry Allison's name was affixed to most, he seemed to have the general passion common to his age, and for the most part, though clever and promising for a child, they showed evidently no signs of the hand of a master. At length she came upon one of a

very different order. It was the head of a man, or rather the rough, hasty outline of one, but the force of expression and the mastery of touch, were of no ordinary character. It was so eminently suggestive in itself, so powerful and masterful in drawing, that Catherine, as she stood contemplating it, forgot the lapse of minutes. If she had needed proof of the artist, there was an eccentric P. E. in one corner. At that moment the sound of voices startled her. She heard a clear feeble voice exclaim, as though the speaker were near her door—

“Is she come? Oh! I can’t go in! I don’t think I shall ever be able to go in!” and then followed an answer, the soft, feminine tones of which rendered the words inaudible.

“Oh, well!” urged the boy, fretfully, “not now; if she comes for good, then it will be time enough. No—no, I can’t go in now; don’t make me!”

The mother seemed to yield, Catherine heard the boy’s retreating steps, then the handle of

the door was turned and Mrs. Allison entered : Catherine dropped the drawing and turned hastily round.

Mrs. Allison's manner banished any trepidation the young girl was experiencing, and in truth, although she was proudly questioning why she should suffer herself to be awed by wealth and station, the fact was she did feel considerable agitation. The lady's greeting was such as she might have given to any stranger whose acquaintance she was anxious and pleased to make, there was not a shade of the assumption or consciousness of superiority. To the charm of this well-bred graciousness was added a beauty not yet beyond its prime. She was about thirty five years of age, tall, and though slight there was a perfect development of the finely-proportioned form. The features might have been objected to on the score of perfect regularity, but the complexion was clear, the dark brown eyes expressive and well-cut, the smile of the lips sweet and attractive, and the hair, parted back, from th

intelligent brow, was rich in its auburn shade and luxuriance. Her bearing was that of a polished woman used to good society, and in the involutions of the fine throat and neck there was that mixture of dignity and ease which, owing to its distance from what is common, we are prone to term aristocratic. A shade of sadness which pervaded her whole aspect did more for her in Catherine's estimation than any thing else. She could scarcely harbour displeasure against one who looked unhappy.

"Let us sit down, Miss Irving," she said, still retaining her hand and drawing her towards the sofa from which she had risen. "May I hope you are come prepared to take charge of my poor boy?"

Catherine smiled. The tone and manner were so seductive she could almost have found it in her heart to say "yes" at once, especially with the glimpses the room had furnished her of the boy's tastes and pursuits.

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"I don't doubt," pursued Mrs. Allison, "that if you do not object to your pupil every other point may be arranged to your satisfaction. Larry will claim very few hours out of your day, your time will then be at your own disposal except perhaps when I shall venture to put in a plea to your companionship."

"You are very kind, Madam, but I am not so sure of myself. I may be willing but perhaps I am not so capable to teach your son. A boy requires so profound an instructress."

"Ah! I detect the lurking irony," returned Mrs. Allison smiling, "and I am not taking your capabilities quite for granted. To be candid, I have had in my hands some of your Latin verses, and seen a most honourable translation from a passage in the "Symposium."

Catherine's look of astonishment spoke for her.

"It is your tutor who has betrayed you," pursued her companion. "When Mr. Erskine spoke of you I naturally required some proof of his assertions. He obtained these credentials from Mr. Fawcett, and that very easily, seeing you gave up all your exercises into his hands. I consider they have managed the matter both diplomatically and considerately, and only hope it may end in your satisfaction being equal to my own."

Catherine was silent and looked at the speaker with as much earnestness as politeness would permit. This prompt and easy mention of Mr. Fawcett's name was the last thing she had anticipated, and there was such perfect unconsciousness of her unworthiness to pronounce it, such a complete knowledge of the fact of relation between herself and him that she knew not what to think. One thing she could not know—by what hard effort and painful pre-consideration and schooling

Mrs. Allison had relieved herself of the necessary allusion with so complete a self-possession.

One conclusion naturally suggested itself to Catherine's mind, that Mr. Erskine must have given himself some trouble in the affair which might possibly arise from an interest in herself, and that as Mr. Fawcett and he must certainly have made her a subject of conversation, he must know more of her character and abilities than she had supposed. Moreover to whom did she owe Mrs. Allison's prepossession in her favour but to him? She condemned it as weakness, yet in spite of herself her heart beat quicker and her cheek flushed. Mrs. Allison's broke the brief pause—

“You are not angry with your friends?” she asked.

In spite of her late feeling, Catherine found it impossible to resist the gentle voice.

"Angry ! no, I ought to be and am obliged to them."

"Mr. Erskine," continued the lady, "has taken a most uncommon interest in my poor boy. He has been most solicitous when he knew my intention of getting him a teacher, that he should have a kind and competent one. Larry, who scarcely opens his heart to any one, is devoted to Erskine. He presumes upon his kindness to take liberties which I dare not—in truth, I am rather afraid of him. Do you know him intimately, Miss Irving?"

"No," said Catherine, who was condemning her folly bitterly in ascribing the interest to herself which was due only to the child ; "I have never seen him but once, and that more than two years ago."

"Indeed ! I imagined he knew you ; but to refer to my little son. He has a taste for books, and is a clever child ; but as it will be next to impossible for him ever to take his place in society, a thorough education is not so

imperative. Yet he is greedy of learning; teach him, my dear Miss Irving, what you can, anything and everything he has a fancy to learn, and where, as he gains upon you, you should find yourself at fault, your influence may induce him to receive lessons from a master. You see I speak as if you had already consented—I speak as I hope. I want a companion and friend as much as Larry wants a teacher.”

“You are very kind,” repeated Catherine; “I wish I could see Larry though!”

“I should have to compel him to come in, which is not desirable, he shrinks naturally from seeing strangers. Poor child! he feels his cross already. However, I can give you some idea of him, I think I saw him with the book this morning.”

Mrs. Allison rose as she spoke, and went to the little book-strewn table. She took up the volume of Homer, and turning to one of the

blank leaves, presented it to Catherine. There was a sketch in chalk of a child's head. It was a beautiful face, full of too mature an intelligence. The eyes painfully suggestive of unchildish thought and suffering, and round the delicate lips lurked an expression of restless dejection. The features were perfect in symmetry, but sharpened by sickness and precocious feeling; in the young face the roundness of youth was wanting, and the locks that fell over the high brow, though soft were thin. Catherine recognised the artist at a glance. Apart from the interest of the countenance she criticised it as a fine work of art. Her heart warmed towards Larry.

"Oh! I hope he will like me!" she said.

Mrs. Allison smiled well-pleased.

"It is painfully like him," she said; "and more than that, it is a wonderful drawing. I would give a hundred pounds if I could

persuade Erskine to paint my boy's portrait."

"And will he not?" asked Catherine, with deep interest.

"No; he says he is not a portrait-painter; if he would consent to become one, he might do rapidly what he is not doing now—make his fortune. His occasional portrait-sketches are eagerly desired, no one is so eminently successful. This sketch alone is of high artistic value."

Mrs. Allison spoke with the air and decision of a connoisseur. Catherine smiled, hers was an intuitive gift of perception which had been but sparingly cultivated.

"I wonder," she said, "you do not preserve it, ma'am, it will get rubbed and spoiled there."

"Larry won't let me cut it out; he says it is the first book Mr. Erskine ever gave him, and he will preserve it complete. He hap-

pened one day to be in Newman Street, and Mr. Erskine met him and took him to his studio. It was then the book was given, the name written, and the portrait taken. If you knew Mr. Erskine, you would not wonder that we make so much of these little favours."

Catherine did not wonder at all, there was no persuasion necessary now to induce her to take the situation. Less interesting details followed, less interesting to the reader, though of great importance to Catherine. She was more than satisfied with every arrangement, the salary was extremely liberal, and there were no distasteful restrictions or conditions imposed. Her time would be comparatively at her own command; she was to rejoice in a private room sacred from all intrusion but what she permitted, and to the society that met in Mrs. Allison's drawing-rooms she was to have free and equal access. They parted mutually pleased.

Mrs. Allison had persuaded Catherine to name an early day for her coming to take possession of her office, and had arranged to send her carriage to Sydenham to fetch her.

END OF VOL. I.

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